NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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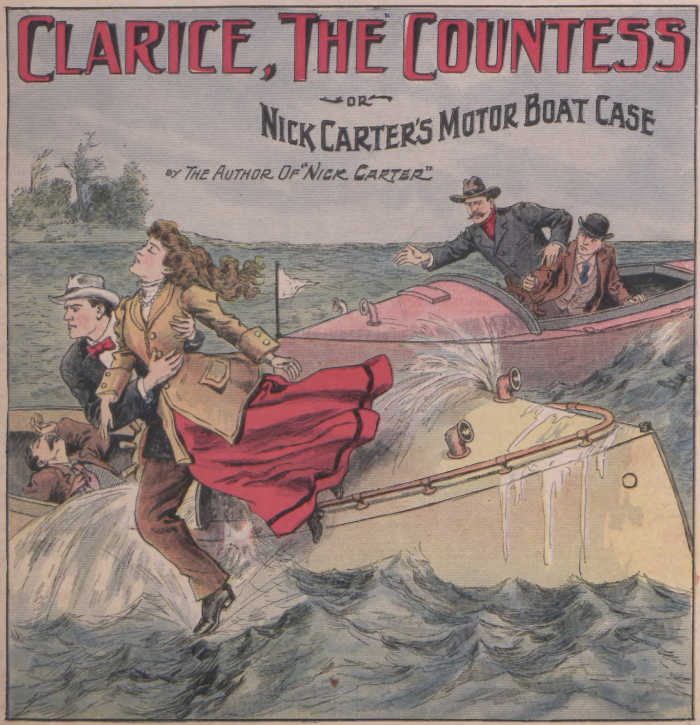
# CLARICE, THE COUNTESS

OR

## NICK CARTER'S MOTOR BOAT CASE

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"



Seizing Clarice in his arms, Nick leaped with her into the water, free from the sinking boat.

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# CLARICE, THE COUNTESS;

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Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

## CHAPTER I.

CLARICE, THE COUNTESS DE MORNEY.

Nick Carter looked at the card, which Joseph handed to him, and read:

"Clarice St. Cyr." Then he raised his eyes, and asked: "Where is she, Joseph?"

"In the library, sir. She is Miss Glenn's maid, you know, sir."

"Yes. Say that I will be down in a moment."

When the detective entered the library a few minutes later, Clarice rose to meet him; and she smiled somewhat whimsically as she—rather hesitatingly—extended her hand toward him.

Clarice St. Cyr had always been a mystery to Nick Carter. He had known her only since she had "taken service" with Carmen Glenn, where she acted in the capacity of lady's-maid to the young and beautiful heiress, whose father had just been murdered by his relative by marriage, Juan Santillos. "Loco Juan" Santillos, he was called; and he was now in the death-house at Sing Sing, awaiting the day of execution.*

The detective was positive that Clarice had not always lived a life of service to others. Indeed, he doubted very much if she had ever served in that capacity at all until she went to live with Carmen Glenn, for that she had been born to the purple and had been reared in gentleness, refinement, and even luxury was evident in every act and gesture she made.

Once, when the detective had made her up in imitation of her mistress, and had taken her to the great dining-room of the Hotel Mammoth, arrayed in her mistress' clothing, Clarice had conducted herself with such perfect naturalness that Nick knew at once that for the moment she was back in her own sphere, and that she was in reality a lady born and bred, accustomed to the surroundings of gentility and elegance.

And at that time Clarice had played the part required of her so well that the detective had told her then and there:

"You would make a first-class detective, Clarice, and if ever you are in need of different employment from that which you now have, come to me."

He found himself wondering now, as he approached her, if she had taken him at his word and had come to apply for the position of lady assistant on his staff.

*See No. 526 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "A Double Mystery." Also No. 525 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "The Passenger of the Night Local."

"I am glad to see you, Clarice," he said. "Tell me first, how is Miss Glenn?"

"Very well, indeed," she replied. "Her father's death has proved less of a shock to her than we supposed; that is, she has recovered from it much more quickly than I dared to hope."

"And now, Clarice, what brings you here to see me this morning?"

She smiled brightly upon him before she replied; and then she said:

"The only surprise to me, Mr. Carter, is that I have not come to you sooner, for I have had the idea to do so in my mind ever since the first time I saw you at the house of Mr. Glenn. I want to tell you a part of my story, and then I wish for your advice, and, if possible, your assistance."

"You shall have both, Clarice—freely. But, first, follow me to my study. It is a room to which I never take clients, unless they are also old friends; but, also, it is a room to which I always take my friends who have suddenly become clients."

She smiled again brightly, and Nick thought to himself how beautiful she was; with a rare strange, weird sort of beauty, intense in its possibilities and startling in its reality when she chose to let it shine upon you.

And so, presently, they were seated together in that particular sanctum of Nick's.

"Clarice," he said, "I think you are the first woman, with the exception of my housekeeper and the maid, who has entered this room in two years—since I lost my wife. Now, what is the story you have to tell me?"

"I wish to ask you first if you remember something you said to me that night when we dined together at the Mammoth—the night when I played the part of Miss Glenn in order to assist you in your work?"

"Perfectly. You refer, I suppose, to my suggestion that if you ever cared to become a——"

"No, no! I don't mean that," she exclaimed, laughing outright.

"No? What, then, do you refer to?"

"You recognized something about me at the time which led you to say that I had not always been a servant."

"Oh, yes; I remember. But that fact was—and is—so palpable, that one scarcely needs to remember it. It is always evident."

"And yet I have tried my utmost, both in manner and deed, to conceal the fact."

"I have no doubt of that. You have succeeded very well, too, save for a certain grave dignity that you have about you in everything you do. But we need not discuss that part of it."

"No. I came here to tell you who I really am. Do you think you will have the patience to listen?"

"I am sure of it."

"I am in reality Countess De Morney. My full name is Clarire St. Cyr de Morney. St. Cyr was my maiden name. I married Comte Raoul de Morney two years ago, in France, when I was a few months less than eighteen years old. I am the only daughter of the Marquis of St. Cyr, who was mysteriously murdered within an hour after my wedding, and while the château was as yet thronged with guests. It is possible that you may be as familiar with the details as I am, Mr. Carter."

Clarice made this rather startling statement as calmly as if she had been reciting the history of a third person, and although the smile had died out of her eyes, it was still upon her lips as she made the disclosure; for to Nick Carter it was a disclosure of a startling character, inasmuch as the case to which she referred had been rather a remarkable one.

In a word, the circumstance as Nick knew about it, was to the effect that the old Marquis of St. Cyr had been discovered stabbed to death in his own room at the château immediately after the ceremony of marriage between his daughter, an only child, and the Count De Morney; and the daughter—the young and beautiful bride—had been found standing beside him.

She held in her right hand the Oriental dagger with which the old man had been killed—a jeweled weapon, richly engraved, which for many years had been one of the many ornaments that were displayed in the marquis' room.

She was discovered then, standing beside her dead father, with the stained dagger in her hand, with an expression of horror on her face and with blood-stains upon her hands and bespattered over the bridal gown she wore.

It was all very vague in the mind of the detective, for he had his knowledge only from reading, about the affair in the papers at the time; but he remembered now, when Clarice referred to it, that there had been some sort of a quarrel between father and daughter the day before the wedding, and he recalled now that she had been arrested and tried for the murder.

The fact that she was ultimately acquitted of the crime was a surprise to everybody, save the court itself, and the few people who had followed the trial from beginning to end; and it had been accepted as a foregone conclusion by the mass of people generally, that the young woman was guilty, notwithstanding the verdict of acquittal.

And after the wedding, the murder, and the acquittal, the young countess who was wedded without being a wife, had strangely and mysteriously disappeared.

Her young husband—the Count De Morney—had disappeared before she did, although at the trial of his bride for her life, he had been strongly in evidence, and indeed it was his testimony that had done the most to thrust her deeper into the shadow of suspicion and conviction.

But on the day when the verdict of "not guilty" was

pronounced, he had disappeared, and within a month she was also gone, no one knew whither.

It had been supposed by many that they had fled together; that both were really guilty of the crime, either jointly, or certainly with knowledge after the fact.

And then, like all other affairs of the kind, interest in it had died away and had gradually been forgotten. Other interesting episodes had taken its place; the chateau was closed and in the hands of caretakers; the incident, so far as the fickle public was concerned, seemed closed.

This, in substance, is an epitome of Nick Carter's knowledge of the affair; and it all came back to him in about the form in which it has been stated here, during the time she was explaining who she really was.

He found that he was astonished without being greatly surprised; and when she completed the statement, he returned her calm gaze quite as gravely.

"Yes," he replied; "I am familiar with the details in so far as one may be made familiar with such an affair by reading newspaper accounts of it. That is all. You were acquitted at the trial, Clarice."

He made the remark very quietly, using her given name in exactly the manner he had done before the revelation was made; and instantly her eyes filled with tears, which she hastily forced back again.

"Thank you," she said, in a low tone. "I understand you, and I appreciate your kindness. Yes, it is true that I was acquitted at the trial; but it is also true that there are hundreds, thousands, in fact, who believe now that I murdered my father."

"I have no doubt of that. However, I am not one of them, Clarice."

"Thank you again. I am the wife of Count Raoul de Morney, although I have never seen him save at the assizes, where he testified against me, since we stood side by side to receive the congratulations of our guests immediately after the ceremony of marriage."

The detective nodded.

"I understand," he said. "Now, tell me in a word exactly why you have come to me this morning. I know that you have a reason which is not wholly apparent at the present moment."

"Yes," she replied slowly; "I think, in fact, that I have several reasons, and chief among them all is the one great desire of my life to know who *is* guilty of that crime for which I was charged and for which I nearly paid the penalty."

"I know," said Nick. "Go on."

She took an envelope from her purse and held it between her fingers.

"I received this letter a week ago yesterday," she said slowly. "It is from Count De Morney—from Raoul. I want you to read it, and after you have done so, I would like to tell you all that I have on my mind to say on the subject."

She still held the letter in her hand, and now she leaned a little toward him and added:

"I don't know if you will understand me, but I have been so entirely alone in the world ever since that awful thing happened in my life, that I have not known what it is to have a friend or a confidante. At the time I was charged with the crime everybody shrank from me, save a few of my very warmest friends; and I suppose that I even estranged those by my own acts; for in the position I was in, I believed that even they looked upon me with askance, and that I was an abomination in the sight of all mankind. I became morbid, and for a time I even hid my identity under a name that was entirely assumed. It was not until I went to live with Miss Glenn, in the capacity of a maid, that I reassumed my own family name—Clarice St. Cyr. I do not regard the name De Morney as mine at all. I never have. But St. Cyr *is* my name, and in my own heart I know that I have no reason to conceal it. Will you read the letter, Mr. Carter? After that we will talk it over, and you will tell me what I ought to do. I know that you will be my friend; I have known it all along; and—God only knows how sincerely I want and need one."

"Yes, I will read it," he replied, still with his eyes upon her. "And I will be your good friend, too, Clarice."

## CHAPTER II.

### THE THREATENING LETTER.

The letter which she now gave to him to read was as follows:

"CLARICE: I suppose, like others, it has occurred to you to wonder what has become of me. I also suppose that you will not be particularly elated to hear from me; to discover that I am anywhere near you—or, in fact, that I am still among the living. But the fact remains that I am very much alive, and that through an accident which I will not now take the trouble to explain I have become aware of your own existence near me.

"The knowledge came to me in quite an unexpected manner, and I have been considering for several weeks whether it would be well to communicate with you; in fact, ever since I knew of your nearness, I have turned the matter over and over in my mind—and I have finally decided to write to you. For, after all, you are my wife, although, I suppose, you have no love for me.

"Why should you have? Until the day of our wedding I rarely saw you at all. I knew you only as a young thing lately released from a convent; and you were sold to me—or, rather, to put it correctly, I was sold to you—after our abominable French fashion, when you had no more idea of the meaning of the word love than a babe, and I—well, I loved another woman.

"I need not tell you who that other was, or is; for, to tell you the truth, I scarcely knew—and do not now know—myself. She was a mystery to me and remains so to this day. I only know that her name is Dolores, and that she is Spanish. But enough of that. I did not begin this letter in order to write about her, who may be dead for all I know, and who, doubtless, I shall never see again, although at the time I recognized you I heard her name mentioned.

"Since I discovered the fact of your existence near me, I have made a great many inquiries about you, and I have found that you are choosing to live in the capacity of a lady's-maid to Miss Carmen Glenn, the heiress to many millions. This I cannot understand—that is, I cannot find an explanation for it on the face of it, although there may be one which I hesitate to name, fearing to give offense—for I know that you inherited a fortune from your father.

"The 'dot' which came to me through you has long since been expended. I haven't a red cent of it left, as they would say in this country; but, all the same, I have managed to make a very good living, with always money in my pocket to spend. How I do it need not matter at this time, however.

"I can understand your preferring to live under cover, for I know—well, never mind what I know. You were acquitted at the trial, and that is enough.

"Now, my dear, it has occurred to me that you have got a great deal more sand than I gave you credit for. I remember that you are beautiful; and I am reminded that you are my wife. So I have decided after careful thought to write you this letter and to ask you to link your fortunes with mine.

"I desire you to reply to this letter at once, to address your answer to 'William Brown,' at the general post-office, *poste restante*, and in that letter to make an appointment to meet me any evening in the week in the Persian room at the Hotel Mammoth; only be sure to give me at least two days' notice of the time.

"That is all for the present. It is important that we meet and hold a consultation, and when I assure you that I will find a way to make it mighty unpleasant for you if you refuse, I have no doubt that you will consent. And if you are the woman I think you are, judging, of course, from your present association with the heiress, you will jump at the chance to see me. I have a plan which I think will please you. We will take society by storm and we will simply wallow in riches. That is all. The sight of you suggested the plan, and it will be as easy of accomplishment as—well, as easy as writing this letter.

"I shall expect to hear from you at once.

"YOUR HUSBAND."

Nick held the letter open in his hand, but dropped the hand to his knee.

"You say that you received this a week ago yesterday?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Have you replied to it?"

"No."

"Then it is likely that you have received another one; eh?"

"Yes. Here is the other."

She removed a second envelope from her purse and passed it to the detective; and this time he read aloud:

"'CLARICE: Possibly you have not received my letter; probably you have, and have elected to ignore it. I wish to remind you that such a course would be dangerous. I must hear from you, and I must see you and talk with you, and that without delay. Write to me at once.

"'R.'"

"When did you receive this one?" asked Nick.

"Yesterday."

"Have you replied to it?"

"No."

Nick left his chair at the desk and motioned to Clarice to occupy it.

"Sit there and write as I shall dictate," he said. "After that, we will continue the conversation."

"Do you mean that I am to write to him?" she asked.

"Yes; by all means."

She took her seat at the desk, and Nick dictated:

"'I have received your two letters. I will be in the Persian room at the Mammoth, Thursday evening of this week, at eight o'clock, and will wait fifteen minutes.' You need not sign it at all, Clarice. Here is an envelope. Now address it as he told you to do in the first note. That is right." He touched the bell, and when Joseph appeared told him to post the letter at once.

"Don't forget, now," he said to her, after Joseph had gone out. "Thursday evening, at eight o'clock. You must go there alone—but you will not be there alone, for I shall be near at hand; near enough to hear what is said, if possible; at least, near enough to see what takes place."

She nodded.

"I do not in the least like the idea," she said; "but I came here to ask for your advice and to follow it when given. I will do so without question."

"That is the way to talk, Clarice. This is Tuesday. You and I will take pains not to see each other on Thursday; but Thursday evening, when you enter the Persian room at the hotel, I will be there already. In all likelihood he will ask you to adjourn to some other place with him."

"I have no doubt of that."

"He may object to the Persian room at that hour, being too public for his uses."

"Yes."

"He may suggest the dining-room and a quiet, obscure table; or he may insist upon going out somewhere. You must refuse to be enticed from that room."

"Yes."

"Make any excuse that occurs to you at the time, but do not leave the room in his company on any account."

"I will not."

"And no matter what his proposition to you may be appear to consent to consider it."

"Yes."

"I have an idea from the tone of his letter that it will shock you. The letter reads to me as if he was considering some plan for robbing Carmen Glenn, for he plainly suggests that he has been living by dishonest means since he spent the money you brought to him."

"I thought that, also."

"He suggests it plainly enough; and he appears to think that you have some such scheme in your own mind; or, at least, that you are situated so that such a scheme could be carried out, and he does not despair of your consent to his plans."

"I thought all that, too."

"So, no matter how greatly he shocks you at the time of the meeting, appear to consider his plans. You may resent them at first, of course. Don't fall into his ideas too readily."

"I understand."

"Dress quietly and wear a veil. I will be in the character of a very old man. When you enter the room I will rise and leave it; but presently, after his arrival, I will return and I will seat myself as near to you as I can do so without attracting his attention or forcing him to move farther away."

"But how shall I rid myself of him after the interview is over? He may insist upon seeing me home, or——"

"You shall tell him that the automobile is coming after you; *the* automobile, with *the* housekeeper. It will be my automobile and my housekeeper, but he need not know that. It will be at the south entrance to the hotel, after 8:15, and Chick will be acting as chauffeur. I will leave all the rest to your wit."

"Very well. I can do it. But please tell me—what do you hope to accomplish by this plan?"

"Before I answer that question, I want you to answer a few."

"Yes."

"First, tell me something about Raoul de Morney. Were you in love with him?"

"No. I scarcely knew him at all. The marriage was made up between his uncle and my father, after the manner of all French alliances."

"Yes."

"You will have to question me about him, because I don't know what it is that you wish me to tell you."

"Tell me something about the man himself. Did he have money?"

"No; he was bankrupt. He had gone through two fortunes; one inherited from his father and the other from his mother. He was a gambler—and worse."

"Somewhat of a libertine, I suppose you mean."

"Yes. At least, such was the impression I received of him, from things that were said to me by others before the wedding."

"If he was bankrupt and the other things, how was it that your father consented to your marriage with him?"

"There were several reasons, any one of which was sufficient so far as my father was concerned," she replied. "The most important one was that my father wished to get rid of me. I was very much in his way. My mother died when I was born. For years I had been kept in a convent. When I did go home to live I was like a white elephant on my father's hands. I was literally in the way."

"I understand. Your father scarcely knew you at all."

"That is it—or part of it. The marquis was what is called an 'old-young man.' He was in the same set with the count. Raoul's family is a very old one, and an important one. An alliance with him was generally regarded as an honor. My father was rich, and Raoul sought me; Raoul had family, and would take me away from the château, so my father sought him."

"I understand. I suppose it was because of this condition of affairs that you and your father quarreled just before the wedding."

"Yes."

"Now tell me more about Raoul. It is evident that he chooses to make you think that he believes you guilty of the death of your father, so I wish to know all there is to know about him."

"I know so little about him, Mr. Carter. I knew him not at all."

"But that little that you do know—that and the impressions you received of him, and the reasons you gave your father for objecting to the marriage—you can tell me all that, Clarice."

## CHAPTER III.

### WHO WAS THE MURDERER?

"It was one of the elder women servants at the château who told me about him," said Clarice. "She was devoted to me, and she told me that she would rather see me in my shroud than the wife of Count De Morney. She gave him a terrible reputation. I could not repeat the half of it to you; not even the substance of it."

"I can understand what you mean."

"And beside all that, he was a confirmed gambler who

would risk everything, even the honor of his name, and possibly that of his wife as well, on the turn of a card."

"Go on."

"He was deeply in debt; it was even whispered that there were questionable transactions of his from which he expected his marriage with me to extricate him."

"Do you know what they were?"

"No; not at all."

"It is, however, probable that they may have had something to do with his flight and disappearance later. Do you think so?"

"I think it very probable, Mr. Carter."

"Anything more?"

"He was—and I suppose is—with it all, a very handsome fellow. Notwithstanding his dissipations, he was an athlete; a man of great strength and daring; a confirmed duelist, and one of the few who always fought to kill, or maim, an antagonist; cold, cruel, merciless in the pursuit of a desire; naturally wicked—and a daredevil about all things. I think that sums up all I know about him."

"Tell me exactly what were your feelings toward him that day when you married him."

"I despised him, hated him, and feared him, all at once."

"And you told these things to your father?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"At the time we had the quarrel."

"Just when was that, in reference to the death of your father?"

"It was the day before the wedding, late in the afternoon."

"Tell me about that quarrel."

"It was not really a quarrel at all; or, at least, it was a one-sided one. I pleaded with him and he became very angry, finally ordering me from his presence. I did not see him after that until I was dressed for the ceremony. He came to my rooms, then, and I at first refused him admittance."

"Go on."

"But, Mr. Carter, he was my father and I was leaving him. At the solicitation of others I finally admitted him to my rooms, but when he sought to caress me I would have none of it. I turned my back upon him and refused even to give him my hand to kiss."

"And then——"

"He left the room, angry himself, saying that I would regret my actions. The next time I saw him was at the ceremony, and then I did not meet his eyes, so that really the next time I saw him was when I found him stretched upon the floor of his own room, dead."

"Tell me about that, please."

"There is very little to tell."

"Tell me what there is about it—exactly as it happened."

"I separated myself from the company. I had noticed the absence of my father from the room and I went in search of him, for it had suddenly recurred to me that we had parted in anger. I was married, and there was no help for that, so I went in search of him."

"Stop a moment. Where was the count—your husband—at that moment?"

"In an adjoining room. He had gone to it a moment before."

"You mean, do you not, a room adjoining the salon of the château?"

"Yes. The library, in fact."

"I understand now. Go on."

"I discovered that I could slip away for a moment, almost unobserved, and I did so. I went first to my own rooms, where I looked at myself in the glass, and I was wondering whether I should try to live and make the best of my fate, or if I should take my own life before the close of that day."

"Poor girl!"

"My heart was filled with horror, Mr. Carter. Nobody but a young girl, innocent of the world as I was, can understand how I felt."

"I think I understand you. Go on."

"I was asked at the trial how long I remained in my room before I started in search of my father, but I could not say—I did not know; I do not know now. I might have been there five minutes, or fifteen, or even twenty minutes. I have no idea."

"You were excited."

"No; I was coldly contemplating suicide; and when I turned away from my mirror to go in search of my father, it was because I suddenly remembered the Oriental dagger that hung upon the wall in his smoking-room."

"Just what do you mean by that, Clarice?"

"I mean that I remembered the dagger, and that I had decided if I did not find my father in the room, I could kill myself with that. I left it to fate to decide for me, determined that if my father should not be there, I would end my life with the dagger; if he should be there, I would try a little while at least to make the best of things as they were."

"And then——"

"Then I entered his room. He was lying dead on the floor. The hilt of the dagger protruded from his bosom. I realized in that instant that he was my father, and that, after all, I loved him. I sprang forward and seized the dagger. I pulled it from the wound, and his blood followed it and spattered upon my hands and clothing. I got down upon my knees beside him and called to him, but he could not answer. Then I stood up again, the dagger still in my grasp, and suddenly I remembered

that I had promised myself that if my father should not be there, I would make use of that same dagger to kill myself. He was *not* there. He had gone. I was just about to plunge the weapon into my own heart when I was interrupted."

"When they found you standing over his body?"

"Yes."

"Clarice, was anybody else ever suspected of the crime?"

"Yes; one of the servants—and there were many theories about it, I believe. I do not know much about the time. I was in prison, you know; and, besides, I was in such a dazed condition that I haven't much recollection of the time."

"I can understand that. Was Raoul de Morney ever suspected of killing your father?"

"I think not. I have never heard that he was."

"Have you ever had any suspicions about the real perpetrator of the deed yourself?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"How could I suspect anybody? I knew so little of my father's life. I did not know his friends or acquaintances or associates. I knew nothing of his life save that much of it were better left unknown."

"Did you never suspect Raoul de Morney?"

"No. I have never thought of him in connection with it."

"Does it occur to you now that he might have committed the deed?"

"No; that is, not as you suggest it. I do not doubt that he would be capable of it, if the provocation occurred; but why should he have done it? What reason would he have had to do such a thing at such a time?"

"Those are questions which I cannot answer now. I understood you to say that your father was a rich man."

"Yes. He was a keen man of business, with all his shortcomings. He speculated extensively and was generally very successful."

"What has become of all that wealth now?"

"It is mine."

"Where is it?"

"In charge of trustees who were appointed in his will."

"Subject to your order at any time?"

"When I shall be twenty-four, yes. In the meantime there is an income that is paid to me quarterly. I receive it through the bankers in Paris."

"Then it is known to the bankers where you are?"

"Yes; but not what I am. I mean that they do not know me to be serving as a maid."

"But why have you done that? I can see no good reason for your action. You were acquitted. You——"

"Oh, that has nothing to do with it at all."

"Then why——"

"Mr. Carter, you will smile at me, I suppose, when I tell you the real reason, but it is none the less true for all that."

"Tell me what the reason is."

"Horror of Count Raoul de Morney. Fear of meeting him. Dread lest he should claim me for his wife. My bankers and the few friends I have left in Paris know where I am and why I remain in hiding."

"But since you went to Miss Glenn you have taken your own maiden name."

"Yes. I did not feel that I could deceive her. When she asked my name, at the time I applied for the place, I told her the truth; but as her maid I have felt that I was sufficiently out of the world to pass unknown; and who would think of suspecting that Clarice St. Cyr, the maid, was the same as Clarice St. Cyr, the countess and heiress?"

"Nobody; only your face would be readily known."

"Yes. But I could keep that out of the way—out of sight."

"The result—those letters—prove that you have not done so. Do you still feel all that horror of the man who is your husband?"

"Yes, and more. Please tell me if it is possible for him to take me by force. If I thought that——"

"You need not think it. It is not possible. You are not in France now, where a husband practically owns his wife. It is not so here."

"Thank God for that! I can defy him, then, if he should threaten to take me with him, even without my consent?"

"Yes; only I do not wish you to do that—just yet."

"Very well. I will be guided in all things by you."

"That will be best. And that brings us back again to the question you asked some time ago."

"What was that? I have forgotten."

"You asked me what I expected to accomplish by this plan of sending you to the hotel to meet the count, and inducing you to appear to listen to his suggestions."

"Ah, yes."

"I suppose you have read that letter of his several times, haven't you?"

"I have read it many times—yes."

"He insinuates that he believes you to be guilty of that crime. He threatens you vaguely with unpleasant consequences if you fail to do as he requests. He suggests that he is now living the life of a crook of some sort, and he hints at a deep plot to obtain Carmen Glenn's fortune—or a part of it, at least."

"Yes."

"Well, Clarice, with such a man as that—with such a man, also, as you have described him to be—it is always well to know as thoroughly as possible just where he stands, and I believe by this method we can unmask him entirely. But more than all, Clarice, I hope through him to find out who *is* guilty of your father's murder."

## CHAPTER IV.

### A MAN TO BEWARE OF.

There were two or three minutes of silence between them after that, which Nick Carter brought to an end by asking:

"Have you any knowledge of having met the man on the street, Clarice?"

"None whatever," she replied.

"You have no idea, then, when it was that he saw you to recognize you?"

"No."

"Is there no incident of the kind that suggests itself to you?"

"None at all. I really think that he must have seen me at the window of the house."

"Why do you think that?"

"For the reason that I never go out without wearing a veil. I am quite sure that I have not been on the street once since I have been with Miss Glenn when I have not worn a veil. I am also careful to wear one when I go in the carriage or in one of the automobiles. I think that the only way in which he could have seen me to recognize me was through the window."

"Possibly the man might recognize your figure or your walk."

"I do not think so. He did not know me well enough for that. Count De Morney has not seen me three times in all his life when I was not seated in his presence. I am, in fact, rather surprised that he should have known me at all."

"Yours is not a face that is so readily forgotten, Clarice; nor is your voice. Both have a method of their own of engraving their memory upon a man."

"I don't know whether that is a compliment or not," she smiled back at him. "The fact remains that he has seen me and recognized me."

"Yes. I don't think we can get away from that. Describe him to me, Clarice."

"His looks, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"He is tall, for a Frenchman—fully six feet, I think. He is magnificently proportioned, and he walks erect, like a soldier. He has more of the look of an Englishman than a Frenchman, for he is fair. His eyes are blue; his mustache, if he wears one now, the color of molasses candy that has been thoroughly pulled. His hair is somewhat darker—almost brown. His features are regular, and he has shapely hands and feet. He speaks English without the suggestion of an accent. In fact, he is a wonderful linguist. I have heard, speaking many of the languages fluently; and I have been told—by that same servant who told me other things—that he was at one time a government spy."

"Ah, indeed! Do you know of any reason other than what you have already told me why he should have thought it necessary to disappear at the time he did?"

"No."

"And have you never received any sort of word from him since that time, until these letters?"

"No."

"Nor during the time of your imprisonment?"

"Yes; I heard from him three or four times then. It always came to me through an intermediary."

"A mutual friend?"

"Not a mutual friend. We had none such; but through a friend of his who was at the wedding, and whom he afterward sent to the prison to see me."

"For what purpose? That might be an interesting item."

"At first it was a suggestion, very delicately made, but I nevertheless understood it, that if I would supply the money he thought it might be possible to bribe my jailers so that I could escape."

"You had money of your own even then?"

"I had more than two hundred thousand francs—forty thousand dollars—of my own. Yes."

"What reply did you make to the suggestion?"

"I sent word to him that I would rather spend the remainder of my life in prison than to pass it with him."

"What were the other messages?"

"Merely offers of service, and always with the underlying motive for me to let him have my money to use for my benefit."

"At the trial did he testify against you?"

"He certainly made no effort to save me. He made a great show of telling the truth as he pretended to see it, and while he had the air of endeavoring to shield me, I could see plainly, as did my lawyer, that he wanted me to be convicted. Don't you see that if the verdict had been against me, he would then have sought to have me sentenced to penal servitude, instead of to death, and that ultimately he would have possessed himself of the entire estate?"

"I begin to understand it now."

"And all the while he would have posed as the loving husband whose heart was broken by the terrible trouble that had come upon him."

"Tell me the substance of what he swore to at the trial."

"That he saw me ascend the stairs a little while before the murder was discovered; that my father had told him of the quarrel between us the preceding day; that I had once in a conversation with him mentioned the Oriental dagger with which my father was killed—which was true, for I had once spoken of it as a curious work of art—and that he was among the first to enter the room when I was found with the dagger in my hand and the blood-stains upon my hands and clothing."

"I can imagine how he told all that. At the time of the

death of your father, the marquis, was anything stolen from his person or his rooms?"

"I don't know. I have never heard that there was; although——"

"Well? Although what, Clarice?"

"My father was in the habit of keeping large sums of money in the safe in the room where he was killed. I have known him to have as much as a million francs there at one time; but it is also true that there were times when there was none there at all. There was none there at the time of his death, so I have been told. The safe was open, but its contents seemed to have been undisturbed."

"So that in fact there might have been a robbery, with nobody the wiser? Is that what you mean?"

"Yes."

"Did Count De Morney, at the time of your trial, account for his own time during the interval when the crime must have been committed?"

"Yes. My lawyer made him do that."

"And how did he account for it?"

"I have already told you that when I left the room to go up the stairs, Raoul was in the library adjoining. He stated that he remained there about ten minutes, he thought, and then he stepped outside in the grounds that surround the building. He went out in company with his friend Henri de la Pierre—who also swore to the same thing."

"And who is Henri de la Pierre? Is he the one who made visits to you at the prison?"

"Yes."

"What do you know about that gentleman, Clarice?"

"Nothing at all, save that he is, apparently, much the same sort of character as Raoul."

"Do you know if De la Pierre has also disappeared from his usual haunts on the other side?"

"I do not know anything at all about him."

"What was the opinion of your lawyer concerning the identity of the murderer?"

"He voiced the general opinion of the time; that is, the opinion that was held by many when I was acquitted. It was that a thief of Paris, knowing of the great wealth, and that many articles of value would be about, had entered the house to help himself, and, being discovered by my father, had seized the weapon and struck him with it."

"Was there any evidence to show that such a person had entered the place?"

"I believe so. I think it was that which went further than anything else toward acquitting me."

"What was it?"

"The château is overgrown with vines. These were badly torn and broken from the ground outside my father's window, all the way to the casement. Two leaves from the vine were found in the room. There was dirt there which had apparently been tracked inside by some one."

"But nothing appeared to have been stolen by the thief?"

"No. It was thought that he was so frightened by what he had done that he fled at once."

"Well," said the detective, "it is not fair that you should live the rest of your life under a cloud because of that affair, and I don't propose that you shall do so. But before we take up anything relative to the manner of your father's death we must close this incident of the letters. You will go to the hotel, as I have directed, Thursday night?"

"Certainly."

"And you will carry out the plans as I have outlined them?"

"Yes."

"You are not afraid to do all this, are you, Clarice?"

"No; if I know that you will be near me. Otherwise I should be afraid. I am really in terror of the count; and I am not of the timid sort, either."

"I know that. Now, another thing, Clarice."

"What is it, Mr. Carter?"

"I think when you return to Miss Glenn now you should tell her the truth about yourself."

"Do you mean the entire story as I have told it to you?"

"Yes. There is no reason why she should not know. She would give you her full sympathy, and you may need her for a friend before we are through. Besides, I think that the count anticipates informing her of all this, in case you should not be so readily managed as he believes you may be."

"I have thought of that."

"Then you had better forestall any information he might be inclined to give to her, for you may be sure that if he should tell her the story would not be exactly as you would tell it."

"That is quite true."

"Then, you will tell her?"

"Yes; at once—as soon as I arrive home from here."

"That is well. I suppose she will think it necessary at once to get another maid."

"I shall not permit her to do that. I shall insist upon serving out my month. Isn't a maid entitled to a month's warning, Mr. Carter?" she asked, laughing.

"Yes; a month's warning, or a month's pay—one or the other. She may insist upon the latter, Clarice."

The detective went with her to the door, and as they were parting he said to her:

"Remember, I shall appear at the hotel in the guise of a very old man. I will saunter into the Persian room and out of it again several times, and particularly while you are there; but I will not speak to you or notice you in any way, nor are you to take any notice of me what-

ever. I have an idea that much may depend upon your adhering to these particulars."

"I will not forget them."

"You are to remember, also, that the automobile will be at the south entrance awaiting you after 8:15, and that Chick will be the chauffeur."

"Yes."

"If the count should follow you out of the hotel you have only to walk straight to the automobile. Chick will be on the lookout, and will be prepared for anything that may happen, so you need have no misgivings about the affair at all. *Only*——" he stopped.

"Only what, Mr. Carter?" she asked.

"I had not thought of this before," he said. "It would not be safe for you to go *to* the hotel alone to keep the appointment. I will send Chick with the auto after you at a quarter to eight. Good-by."

## CHAPTER V.

### THE POISONED STICKPIN.

A few minutes before eight o'clock Thursday evening a very old man might have been seen wandering about the extensive corridors of the Hotel Mammoth.

He was rather conspicuous because of his undoubted age, which was apparent to all observers, notwithstanding the agility with which he got about; and many were the curious eyes that were turned upon him.

We know that the old man was Nick Carter in disguise; we know also that it was part of his plan to render his appearance in the corridors of the hotel as prominent as possible, so that in case Count De Morney or any one sent by him should be on the watch to see if Clarice had engaged anybody to spy upon the interview that was to follow, this particular old man, at least, would not be a suspected party.

Two or three minutes before eight o'clock the detective was standing idly upon the steps at the south entrance to the hotel, smoking a huge, black cigar; and he was therefore there when his own automobile drew up at the entrance, driven by Chick, and Clarice got down, with Jannette, Nick's housekeeper, in the tonneau, awaiting her return.

He did not even glance toward Clarice as she entered the building; and although she sent one swift glance toward the old man on the steps, it was no more of a look than she might have devoted to any stranger in passing.

After a moment or two Nick turned and reentered the building; and as he entered the Persian room by one door, he saw another old man, who came in by another entrance; but this old man was quite tall, and as he [illegible] Clarice was seated in one corner of the room, and Nick dropped negligently into a chair that was far away from her. Then he pulled a letter from his pocket and appeared to be reading it assidulously; but all the time he kept his eyes upon that other old man who, after a hurried survey of the room, deliberately crossed to where Clarice was seated and dropped down beside her.

It was not important that the detective should hear any of the conversation that took place between the two, for he knew that Clarice would tell him all that was said; and yet he felt that he would like to hear the sound of the man's voice.

After a little, having apparently finished the reading of the letter, Nick rose, crossed the room to a window, and stood gazing out of it for a moment, and then abruptly turning he left the room.

He permitted himself to be absent five minutes when he returned quite as abruptly as he had gone out, and, making his way directly to a writing-desk that was near to the place where the two persons in whom he was interested were seated, he dropped into the chair in front of it, and, seizing a pen, began to write.

He found instantly that the accoustic properties of the room were such that he could plainly hear all that was said between Clarice and her companion, who were talking in French—and he doubted very much if either of them would think it possible that he could hear.

As if in substantiation of this belief, he presently heard the count say to Clarice:

"I wonder who that old man can be? I wonder if he can hear what we say?"

"What does it matter whether he hears or not?" replied Clarice.

"It matters to me, and it will matter to you before we are through with this interview," was the reply. "Wait a moment and I will find out."

Nick could hear the man rise—for the detective was seated with his back toward them, and therefore could not see them—and he knew that the count came closely behind him. Then the man said:

"Good evening, sir. How are you?"

Nick did not move or turn his head, but calmly continued his writing; and the count cried again, speaking in a louder tone.

"Good evening, sir," he repeated. "How are you?"

The detective did not budge or, figuratively, turn a hair. He proceeded calmly with his writing; and he smiled to himself when he heard the count turn away and rejoin Clarice.

But the detective had started somewhat when he first heard the sound of that voice so near at hand, for it came to him in a flash that it was not the first time he had heard it.

There was a tone about it that was distinctly familiar; it brought back to his mind some sort of vague recollection of having at some time or other been in communication

with its owner, and now he found himself racking his brain to recall when and where that could have been.

But he put the effort aside for the moment, knowing that he could devote his mind to it later; just now he was more interested in hearing what should be said by the count.

"He's as deaf as a post," said De Morney; "all the same, Clarice, you try him. I wish to be sure. If he *is* deaf, I would rather he sit there than not, for by doing so he will keep others from occupying that particular chair."

Clarice appeared to object, but De Morney insisted, and presently as if with great reluctance she arose and crossed the space between them so that she came to a stop directly in front of Nick Carter.

"Pardon me, sir," she said; "may I have a sheet of that paper and an envelope?"

The detective looked up quickly. Then he started to his feet and made as if to offer her his chair; but immediately she tried to reassure him.

Finally, by aid of many gestures, she succeeded in inducing him to resume his chair, after which she helped herself to paper and an envelope, and was turning away, when Nick said to her in a voice which belonged to a very old man:

"Madam will pardon me. I am very deaf." After which he resumed his writing as if nothing had happened and was apparently oblivious to all around him.

"I guess there is no doubt that he is deaf, all right," said the count, in English, to Clarice, then; and he added in French: "Have you dined, Clarice?"

"Yes."

"I love me. Will you go into the dining-room with me?"

"No; I will remain here."

"But we must have a very long talk. It will be dry work, as well as hungry work, for me."

"It will have to be so then. Besides, I shall not remain here with you above half an hour, Count De Morney."

"Hush, confound you! Keep names to yourself, can't you? I am plain Mr. Brown for to-night. And as for your remaining here only half an hour—you will remain until I choose to let you go; don't forget that, my dear."

She half-rose from her seat on the couch, and she replied coldly:

"I will leave you at once if you threaten me."

"Sit down, you fool!" he exclaimed; and he seized her by one arm and drew her back forcibly beside him.

But she wrenched herself loose from his grasp and sprang from him. Then she turned upon him with flashing eyes, and said coolly:

"Count De Morney, if you touch me again with your hands, I will leave you at once; and if you dare to threaten me again, I will do so. We are in America, in a hotel, and it would require very little on your part to make me call for assistance and tell who you are to the first person who should make an appearance in reply to my call."

"You are my wife!" he ground out, in a rage at her defiance of him.

"We are not in France," was her reply to that taunt.

"Sit down again, will you?" he said, then, adopting another tack, and realizing that she would not be driven.

"Yes," she replied, 'if you will conduct yourself as a gentleman, and will not remind me of things which I prefer to forget."

"That I am your husband, for instance?" he sneered.

"Yes."

"But you are my wife."

"In name only. Now come to the point, if you please, for I shall not remain long with you, and I shall refuse to see you again. Why did you insist upon seeing me?"

"I want you for what you are; that is the long and short of it. You are my wife and I intend that you shall—— I intend to claim you as such."

He made the statement with such savageness, and with such evidence of intense meaning, that again she started to rise; but this time he seized her even more forcibly than before, and as he held her on the seat beside him, he said:

"Look here, Clarice, you needn't drive me too far. You at least know that I fear nothing, and that I am not a person to be defied with impunity. If you try to leave me without hearing me out to the end—without hearing all that I have to say to you, I swear that I'll kill you and take my chances of getting away after it!"

She realized that this was no idle threat, and yet she smiled scornfully. She knew that he was quite capable of doing what he said, and yet she shrugged her shoulders contemptuously.

"Possibly you don't believe me," he said coolly, again master of his temper; "but you would believe if you knew me as well as others know me. Look here!"

Nick had managed to move the desk at which he appeared to be engaged in writing so that a small mirror that was set in its framework reflected everything that the two persons on the couch were doing; and now he saw the count take a small velvet case from his pocket and remove therefrom an object which appeared to be a stickpin for a gentleman's scarf. It was made in imitation of a snake's head, and the pin itself was spiral, so that if used in a scarf it would have to be screwed into place.

This the man exhibited to his companion, and there was a cruel smile on his lips and in his eyes as he did so.

"Do you see this?" he asked.

She nodded.

"One prick with that little pin, imbedded in your arm,

Clarice, and you would never know that you had been hurt; and yet you would be dead the instant it touched you. Oh, you need not shudder so terribly or turn so pale. I have no idea of hurting you—unless you drive me too far, and defy me. But I shall hold the pin in my hand, and if you again attempt to leave me until I give you permission to go, I will use it."

Clarice was brave enough, but she could not repress that shudder which he had noticed and commented upon; and now she realized that the man meant what he said, and that she was in a measure a prisoner until he chose to release her.

But there was one great consolation connected with [illegible] that surrounded her. She knew that Nick Carter was near at hand; that he had heard all that had been said, and that he was prepared to come to her aid whenever it should be necessary to do so.

But could he get to her quickly enough to save her if the count should elect to make use of the deadly pin?

She turned and faced him with flashing eyes; with eyes that belied the terror that was in her heart; and she said, slowly and coldly:

"I do not in the least fear you, Raoul de Morney. As for your deadly pin with which you threaten me, I don't believe that you tell the truth about it. But even if you do, that does not affect me. I have thought so many times of taking my own life that you would only relieve me of the responsibility if you should do it for me. Please go on with what you may have to say, for at the end of thirty minutes I will leave you, whether I go with your permission or not; even if I go by the route you threaten—death."

The man looked upon her with eyes that shone with [illegible] admiration.

"*Dieu!*" he said. "You are a queen, Clarice! I never thought you had such courage as that. See, I put away the pin so. I will threaten you no more. You shall leave me, if you will, at the end of thirty minutes. I see that I cannot move you by threats so I will try to do so by appealing to you. Now, shall we talk amicably?"

"As you please," she replied indifferently.

## CHAPTER VI.

### COUNT DE MORNEY'S PLOT.

"I suppose you won't tell me," he asked, "why you have chosen to live as a lady's maid?"

"Because I chose to do so," she replied, with another shrug of her shoulders.

"But why should you choose [illegible]? such a life as that? Why should you do it when you are, at least, entitled to [illegible]?"

"That is entirely my own affair, sir."

"I know that. But there is a motive behind it, is there not?"

"Certainly there is a motive. There is always a motive for what we do, I believe."

"What is your motive in this case?"

"That I need not tell you—now."

"If it were not for the fortune that you possess in your own right—or which at the least you will possess when you are twenty-four—I would think—I would think——"

"Well, what would you think?"

"I would think that you have ulterior designs upon the fortune of—I will not mention names—of your mistress."

He waited for her to reply, but she did not venture to do so. She merely remained with her head half-turned from him and made no sign whatever.

"Tell me," he said, after a little. "Is it so?"

"Is what so?" she asked.

"Have I guessed correctly?"

"I have not heard that you made a guess."

"You are certainly anxious to lose your identity; you have proved that."

"Well?"

He was silent for several moments, and then as if suddenly resolved at all hazards to say what he had come there to say, he continued:

"Suppose, Clarice, that I could show you a plan by which you could effectually lose that identity which you despise, forever; eh?"

"I should say then," she replied slowly, "that our meeting, much as I dreaded it, had not been entirely without its advantages."

"Good!" He drew nearer to her; but before he could say more, she continued:

"Only that the one great reason why I wish to lose my identity is to conceal it from you, Raoul de Morney."

"Nonsense! I won't trouble you; that is, not if you will fall into my plans."

"I very much doubt if you could suggest any plans which would meet with my favor."

"Clarice!"

"Well?"

"You have seen me before since I have been in America; you have been seated in my presence, not three feet away from me. You have heard me speak, and would have recognized me then if you had had [illegible] thought that I was within a thousand miles of you if you had ever cared enough about me to have remembered me at all. Did you guess that?"

"You are speaking in riddles," she replied.

"And yet it will all be quite plain to you when I have told you when and how it was."

"That is possible."

Both, in the meantime, were [illegible]

it conversation. Ever since he first noted something familiar about the voice of the man, he had believed that the moment would come when the count would himself reveal the source of it before that interview came to an end, and now he felt that the moment had arrived.

And he was not mistaken.

"I know quite a bit about you," said the count, evidently determined to defer the dénouement as long as possible; but she made no reply to that statement. Evidently, it did not interest her.

"I might ask you, for example, how is your good friend, Nick Carter?" he laughed.

Clarice started that time. For just an instant she believed that her companion had been somehow led to suspect the identity of the old man seated near them so deeply engaged with his correspondence; but she quickly dismissed the thought, and he continued:

"It occurred to me that knowing him as well as you do, you might go to him with those letters I wrote to you and ask for his advice. He would have given it quickly enough."

"Do you really think so?" she asked indifferently.

"I am sure of it."

"You are pleased, for some reason, to be thoroughly obscure to-night. When it occurs to you to get down to what you have to say, I shall listen with more interest."

"The time when I saw you, and heard you speak, I mean—the time when I first learned where you were and how you were living, *you were with Nick Carter.*"

She was silent, and not an expression of her face changed; but she could have cried out in her surprise and alarm; as for Nick Carter, he smiled grimly to himself, for he remembered in that instant when and where he had heard that voice before; and he gazed with more interest into the mirror in the frame in front of him, watching the man whose disguise was now, like his own, that of an old man.

"I remember," continued the count, "that one night, about three months ago, you were in company with three men across the North River in a motor-boat from Fort Lee, on the Jersey shore, to New York? Do you remember that at that time there were others with you, and that Nick Carter was one of them? Do you remember that there were several prisoners in the boat—one of whom Nick Carter had gone to the Erie railroad station to arrest? Among those three, other than Nick Carter himself, there was also a hunting case and your valorous mistress, *Miss Clarice Glenn!*"

"I see that you do remember it," he continued, with a laugh. "I see, also, that you are wondering at the presence of a third prisoner; and

[illegible]

"Rest easy on that score. I am not such a fool as to let Nick Carter capture me; and even if he does so now, or should do so later, he is not the man to forget that he owes me a very great favor, and that he has promised to repay it some time."

"A favor?" she asked, raising her eyebrows and turning toward him again.

"Yes," he replied, "a favor—for it certainly was a favor to him when I replied to his hail from the river and turned my boat toward the end of a pier from which he was calling to me. He told me who he was; told me that a young woman had been abducted and that he had to get to the Erie station before a special train could leave there.

"You know the rest, I think. Don't you remember that the special was just starting when Nick Carter leaped aboard of it and pulled the bell-cord? Don't you remember that when he entered the car and held up the gang at the point of his revolver, that another man was just behind him?"

She remembered, and she said so.

"I was that other man. I was 'Bill, of the motor-boat,' whom he thanked so grandly after I had landed you all safely in New York."

"*You?*" she said incredulously.

"Haven't I proved it?" he asked. "Haven't I proved it by retailing all the particulars of that night? Don't you remember that when he offered me money for my services after we had landed in New York, I declined it and told him that some day I might have a favor to ask of him? And don't you remember, too, what he said in reply to that remark of mine?"

"No. What did he say?"

"He told me in effect that when I needed a friend to go to him, and that if he could do anything to favor me he would do it."

"You don't suppose that he meant that he would condone a crime on your part, do you?" she asked, with evident scorn in her voice.

"I don't know what he meant if he didn't mean exactly what he said. It will be time enough for him to split hairs about it—if he wishes to do that—when I go to him for a return favor."

"All this is not telling me why you insisted upon bringing me here," she said, somewhat coldly, for she perceived that the conversation was approaching dangerous ground.

"I am coming to that; I am almost to it. Do you remember one more thing about that night?"

"I recall a great many things about that night," she replied, "so I have no means of knowing exactly to what you refer now."

"Have you forgotten that you also wore a disguise that night, Clarice?"

She started now—and well she might. The question revealed exactly what he was getting at.

"I overhead all that you said that night, Clarice, in making explanations to your mistress who was in the boat with you. You and she were so exactly alike at the time that it is not strange that until that conversation I mistook you for twin sisters. But then, by listening I discovered that she was your mistress and you were the maid; that Nick Carter, with his devilish skill had made you up to look exactly like her in order that he might palm you off at some dinner that had been given that night, as Carmen Glenn; I heard that your real name was Clarice, *and I heard and recognized your voice.* Moreover, you and your mistress spoke together in French, and that was all I needed to tell me exactly who you were.

"I knew then, Clarice, that my wife was in the boat with me. I saw then, in the possibilities of your disguise, great things to be accomplished, and I determined then to bide my time for the fulfilment of them."

"I begin to understand you now," she said, in a faint voice.

"It is high time that you understood."

"Go on," she murmured. "Let me hear you to the end."

"The end is this, Clarice," and he bent nearer to her and lowered his voice so that it was with difficulty that Nick could hear what he said. "If you could be made up once to look so exactly like Carmen Glenn that her intimate friends were deceived, you can do it again. Now the cat is out of the bag, what have you to say about it?"

"Is the cat out of the bag? You will have to be more explicit, I think."

"Listen. Carmen Glenn can't count her millions on the fingers of both hands. I have made inquiries, and I know."

"Well?"

"All those millions might be your—and mine—by the turning of your hand."

He was leaning near to her now and his eyes were gleaming wickedly.

"Mine? And yours?" she said. "I do not understand."

"Don't you? Then I will explain clearly. You can transform yourself into Carmen Glenn by the very simple process of repeating what was done that night. Carmen Glenn's father is dead, and you yourself are her maid, so there will be nobody left near her to perceive the fraud. She has no living relatives, save that one who is now awaiting execution in the deathhouse at Sing Sing. There will be nobody to betray you; nobody to know the difference. You can step into the shoes, the identity, and the riches of your mistress by the simple process of taking possession; and after a year has passed, and you have gradually put aside the disguise, I will appear suddenly and you will marry me all over again. Then we will be rich, *rich, rich!*"

"But," said Clarice, "what of Carmen herself?"

"Carmen? Leave her to me. I will take care of *her.*"

"You would murder her?" gasped Clarice, in evident horror.

The count laughed.

"No," he said. "I will promise you that there shall be no shedding of blood; but I will see to it that she never returns to get in the way of our enjoyment of the riches she now has. Leave all that part of it to me."

"But," exclaimed Clarice, as if she were yielding to the glamour of the thing, "there is one objection to your plan, at least. There is one important element that you forget."

"What is that?" he asked, frowning.

"You have forgotten Nick Carter," she said. "He would know of the fraud at once. You have forgotten to take Nick Carter into account."

## CHAPTER VII.

### CLARICE MAKES A DISCOVERY.

Count Raoul de Morney leaned back against the cushions and chuckled aloud.

"No," he said; "I have not forgotten him at all. He is really the only dangerous obstacle to my plan. I don't know how well he knows Carmen Glenn, or how intimate she may be with him, but I suspect that they are very good friends, and that if the opportunity should offer, he would discover the fraud at once; therefore he must not be permitted to have that opportunity."

"But how would you prevent it?"

"If I were building a road through a forest and a tree were in the way, I would cut it down," he replied sententiously.

"You mean that you would put Nick Carter out of the way?"

"Yes."

"How?"

Once again he drew the velvet case from his pocket, opened it, and revealed the jeweled stickpin it contained.

"With this," he said meaningly.

"But——"

"Hush!" he interrupted her. "One prick from this pin and he would be removed forever from interference with our plans. Nobody would be the wiser. I have hands would thank me for the job, if they could know that I did it. Nick Carter is terribly in the way of some men; just now he happens to be terribly in my way. That is all."

She shrank from him in horror.

"You are asking me to condone a—murder," she whispered hoarsely.

"Listen to me," he said, and he drew his face close to hers. "There are murders and murders. There was one by which your own father met his death, and for which you are still suspected. There are those who to this day believe that you know more about that affair than you have ever cared to reveal. I do not ask you what you know. I do not care. I— "

"Stop!" she exclaimed. "*You*, at least, know that I had no hand in that."

"I assure you it matters not what I know," he replied, with a cold smile; "the fact remains that I could even now easily establish your guilt if I should elect to do so."

"You——"

"Oh, wait! This is no time for talk, save for what I have to tell you, and that is that you *must* consent to carry out our plans. If you do not consent, or if you fail in carrying out what I shall direct, it will be the worse for you."

"Is he threaten me again?" she asked.

"You may call it that if you like. I shall not try to convict you of the murder of your father; you need not fear that. But there is one thing that I will do, if you fail me now."

She did not reply, and he continued:

"See. I have the poisoned stickpin within an inch of your arm. Say that you consent to my plans, or I will prick you with it—*now*."

She made no reply. She sat rigidly in her place by his side, and to an onlooker it would have appeared that she was fascinated by terror; as a bird is fascinated by the stare of a serpent.

He was leaning toward her. His right hand grasped her wrist; his left held the stickpin within an inch of her arm.

But he was looking into her eyes, and in that moment he saw and realized her great beauty as he had never realized it at all before; and it suddenly came to him that even in the rapidity of her color, all the wealth of the world could be as nothing to the possession of this magnificent woman beside him; this woman who was already his wife in fact, but who was far away from him in heart, as the poles of the earth are distant one from the other.

And as he looked then he forgot the stickpin, forgot the game for wealth that he would play, and upon which he had been willing to stake his all; forgot everything save that this wondrous creature was his mate, and that he had no right to marriage and was yet not sure that she cared that he should live.

"Leave!" he said thickly. "Leave!"

She rose and stood.

"Clarice!" he repeated. "You are my wife! Is it you that I want—you?"

He snapped the velvet case together and dropped it into his pocket, and then, before she realized what he was doing he had seized her in his arms and pressed her for one second in his embrace.

Then, as suddenly, he released her; and as he did so, she leaped to her feet, her eyes flashing, her cheeks flushed, her whole form quivering—and she struck him with the flat of her hand upon the cheek. Struck him so that the impact of the blow resounded through the room, and with such force that, although he was in the act of rising from the couch, he was knocked back again upon it, more surprised than dazed, perhaps, but nevertheless overcome. And in that instant she turned and fled through the doorway into the corridor, and thence out upon the street, where with one leap she placed herself beside Chick in the automobile.

"*Drive!*" she exclaimed; and the engine not having been stopped the big machine responded to Chick's touch and started away just as De Morney leaped from the doorway into the street.

He called to her to stop, but she did not turn her head.

"Take me home," she said to Chick, in a low voice. "I am frightened. Tell Mr. Carter to come to me there when he pleases."

Back in the Persian room Nick Carter had witnessed the whole affair, and he had been as greatly surprised and perhaps as much moved by the sudden act of Raoul de Morney as had the countess herself.

He, too, had started to his feet, but the other had been so occupied as not to notice his momentary perturbation; and when Clarice rushed from the room, followed by De Morney, he went also.

On the steps in front of the hotel as the automobile was starting away, he stood exactly behind the count, and he heard him mutter, after he had called to Clarice in vain:

"Go! Go for the present, my wife, but, by all the gods of Roman mythology, I'll have you for my own before you are forty-eight hours older!"

And then, as quickly as he came out of the hotel, he reentered it and, passing rapidly through the corridors, he disappeared before the detective dared to follow him; dared, because Nick realized that in the disguise he then wore, he would attract altogether too much attention if he should undertake to rush through the hotel to the other street.

The detective regretted that he had not brought some one with him to follow the count in the event of his not being able to do so in person; and with a shrug of his shoulders, he turned toward his own home, realizing that he must wait now for some further act on the part of the other.

Chick was there when they arrived, and while the detective removed his disguise they talked together, and

Chick told him how Clarice had leaped into the seat beside him and commanded him to start the machine instantly; how she had been strangely silent and trembling during the ride to Carmen's home, and how she had left him with only a word of thanks and with the uttering of the message for Nick, to come to her when he would.

It was yet early in the evening, so the detective decided to go at once, after first apprising her of the fact over the phone; and at half-past nine she received him in the library of the Glenn mansion.

And he noticed that she was strangely silent; that she kept her distance from him, and that she responded to everything he said in a subdued tone that was strangely unlike her.

She seemed still to be in a trouble of apprehension.

"Come in," said said to him, when he stood in the library doorway. "I am alone. Miss Glenn has gone out for the evening and will not return till late. It was very good of you to come to me at once. I—I had to talk with you to-night, Mr. Carter."

"Yes?" he replied. "What has excited you so, Clarice?"

She started; then she smiled; and she seemed by a great effort to try to appear quite natural. Instead of replying to his question, she asked one.

"Did you hear all that was said?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied.

"I must go away again," she said. "I must disappear once more."

"Go away? Disappear? What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean what I say, Mr. Carter. I find that I have no courage where that man is concerned. I fear him. I dread him. I abhor him. There is a terror of him in my soul which I cannot define, and which I cannot overcome. Were it not for the fact that the law says that I am his wife, it might not be so; but as it is——"

"Well? As it is—what?"

"Ah, you do not understand, and I cannot explain. *Hark!* What was that?"

As she spoke, the door of the library opened and the butler made his appearance. He bore a silver tray, upon which there was a card.

Clarice seemed to know instinctively the name that was inscribed upon that card, for she did not so much as glance at it.

"Miss Glenn is not at home," she said to the butler; but even as she uttered the words a form appeared in the doorway behind the man, and Raoul—Count De Morney—strode into the room and stopped.

He stood facing Clarice, six feet away from her, for she had started backward and now rested one hand upon the library-table, the better to steady herself. The butler had already bowed himself through the door and closed it after him—and Nick Carter stood beside an easel near the door in such a position that the count had not seen him, and did not yet know that a third person was in the room.

Nick nor Clarice could not know then that De Morney had bribed the butler into conducting him straight to the room where Clarice was; and now the detective stood silently awaiting developments.

They came swiftly enough, and Nick did not feel that he was called upon to interfere at once, or to make any effort to let his presence there be known to the count until the latter should turn about and discover it; for the detective was in no way concealed from view. He merely stood where the intruder had not seen him—could not see him unless he looked in that direction, which was directly behind him—and as the butler had not thought to tell the unknown caller of the detective's presence, the fact was not suspected by the count.

In the interval of silence that followed upon the closing of the door behind the butler—an interval of possibly two or three seconds—the count and the countess remained face to face, silently regarding each other.

Nick could see that De Morney was strangely excited, as if he had not yet recovered from the effects of the whirlwind of passion begotten by that sudden stolen embrace at the hotel; and Clarice still kept her hand upon the table to steady herself. Her face had grown strangely white, as if she were in real terror; and Nick wondered at this the more since she must have known that he would stand as her protector, no matter what might happen.

But there are some things which women fear more than they do physical perils; and Clarice St. Cyr de Morney had discovered a secret of her own within the last two hours that filled her with sudden terror lest it should be revealed to the one man of all others from whom she would have concealed it—Nick Carter.

That hateful embrace of the man who was her husband in name, bestowed upon her in the very presence and under the eyes of the one man in all the world whom she would not have had see it, had brought the truth home to her with a suddenness and force that was overwhelming—and it had told her the truth of something which she had not guessed until that moment; she was married to one man and she loved another, and that other had seen her husband—in name only, to be sure, but, nevertheless, her husband—*that man whom she loved had seen the husband whom she despised and hated to offer her a caress.*

That was why she had fled. That was why she was terrorized. That was why she was not herself when the detective called upon her.

She had discovered that she loved him, and she was paralyzed with terror lest he should find out her secret.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE FRENCHMAN'S TRAGIC FLIGHT.

It was Clarice who spoke first, and her voice sounded strangely, even to herself.

"Why are you here?" she demanded of De Morney. "How did you *dare* to come here—to this house? How did you dare?"

He laughed shortly, harshly, still, however, keeping his distance.

"I would do more than that to get to you, Clarice," he said. "I would go through hell to find you."

She seemed studiously to avoid Nick Carter's eyes. She might have looked directly into them over the shoulders of the count; but she did not do so.

"I have been a fool!" said the count savagely, taking one step nearer to her and pausing again, almost as if he dared not approach nearer lest he should frighten her [illegible] one woman in all the world. I never did know it until to-night. I never saw your beauty before; or, if I saw it, I never realized it."

She remained silent, but she was trembling; and still Nick hesitated to interfere. He preferred to wait until she made some sign; or, at least, until there was some overt act on the part of the count which should call for his action. De Morney spoke again.

"When I sent my uncle to your father to ask your hand in marriage, it was your fortune that I wanted; I had never seen at that time," he said. "When I paid my court to you, in the presence of your chaperon, I scarcely saw you at all. I saw only a slip of a girl lately from a convent. At the time of the wedding I was a bit more observant. You were merely a means to the accomplishment of an end—nothing more."

"And then——?" she asked faintly, finding her voice at last.

He started.

"Then"—he laughed shortly—"I wanted *all* the fortune. All of it. You see that I am very frank with you, Clarice. I let nothing stand in my way; not even——" He stopped, and he laughed again rather bitterly.

She leaned a little toward him, her hand still clutching the table on which she was leaning.

"Do you mean," she demanded, "that you outlive to the murder of my father?"

"No!" he said. "No. I mean nothing of the sort. I did not kill your father. But I would kill him now, and you and like him, or any man who dared to stand for an instant between you and me, Clarice. See; I wrote you that I loved another woman, didn't I? I would not [illegible] any of my finger for a million like her, each a million times more lovable than she, as compared with you, my wife!"

"No!" she gasped.

With a bound he reached her side. Again he seized her in his embrace, and again he was in the act of searching for her lips with his own when he was seized from behind and whirled across the room, spinning like a top, until he brought up against another table, clutching it to steady himself and to keep from falling.

Clarice had uttered one cry of fright when the count seized her; and then, when he was hurled away from her to the opposite side of the room, she staggered forward into Nick Carter's arms and clung to him, half-fainting from mingled terror and relief.

And so, for a moment, there was a tableau as Nick, with his arms around Clarice, stood facing the man whom the law said was her husband; the man who now seemed entirely to have recovered his composure; who had drawn himself erect, and who, while he deliberately rearranged the setting of his coat-collar, was smiling wickedly upon them, showing his white teeth after the manner of an angry dog, and all the while calmly contemptuous of the man who was arrayed against him.

"So," he said, with a wicked double meaning, "my wife seems to have a lover."

In all the English language he could not have selected words that would have cut Clarice so deeply as that sentence did.

She saw in it only one meaning, for the innuendo made no impression upon her. She saw only that this man who was her husband had discovered the secret of her love for Nick Carter, and that the terrible truth which she would have hidden if she could, and which, in her utter innocence, seemed a shame to her, had been revealed to the detective thus brutally.

But Nick was equal to the emergency, if she was not. He gave the count back smile for smile, and he replied as deliberately:

"If you mean by that statement, sir, that you are the Count De Morney, I have an idea that you are badly wanted in Paris at this moment."

The count shrugged his shoulders. Then, with studied insolence, he asked:

"Who are you, pray?"

"I am Nick Carter; for the present, the protector of this young lady," was the calm reply.

"Oh. Indeed. I have heard lovers called by that name in my own country"; and he showed his teeth a second time in that wolfish smile of his.

Clarice's arms were still around Nick Carter's neck and he could not resent the remark as he would have liked to do; but he slowly disengaged them and placed her upon a chair that was near at hand.

Then, turning, he again faced the count, and he said slowly:

"De Morney, I have never seen you until now when you did not wear some sort of disguise, but I know you for an utter scoundrel, nevertheless. That you are a criminal also, and even now a fugitive from justice, I do

not doubt. There is the door, Count De Morney. If you will take my advice you will lose no time in passing through it and disappearong."

The count laughed, as if he were greatly amused by the implied threat. Then he shrugged his shoulders again and laughed anew.

"Upon my word," he said, "you are a cool one. You are here as the acknowledged lover——"

"Stop, you scoundrel!" Nick interrupted him. "Another word like that, and I will not allow you the opportunity to go from here unmolested."

He moved a step nearer to the count; and the latter, with a quick move, pulled a revolver from one of his pockets and pointed it at the detective.

"Stand where you are, Carter!" said the count coldly, but with a world of meaning in his tones. "If you make so much as one little move, I will shoot you down with as little compunction as I would kill a rat. Put your hands over your head—quick! I will kill you if you don't."

Nick, as if he intended to obey the order literally, slowly began to raise his hands, but to anybody who knew the detective as we know him, the act in itself—as he did it—would have been ominous.

He raised them slowly in front of him without bending the elbows; that is, he raised them slowly from his sides toward the front until at last they pointed directly at the count; but they did not stop there. They continued to rise until they were both extended at full length directly over his head.

It is known to all of Nick Carter's friends that he always carries—that is, when he is out on business—a small revolver of .32 caliber in each of the sleeves of his coat, and that he can throw either of them into his hand by a quick downward movement of the arm, discharging it the instant he grasps it, and, releasing it just as quickly, allow it to disappear again from whence it came; and so, now as he raised his arms thus slowly, he was merely preparing to make use of this trick, in which he was very expert.

Thus it was that no sooner were his arms in the required position, at which the count was smiling coldly, than he threw his right arm down again with a sudden motion.

The act was followed by a sharp report, and the bullet that sped on its way, struck the barrel of the pistol that the count held in his hand, knocking it aside, and by the shock of it as well as the surprise, almost throwing the man himself off his feet.

[illegible] pistol [illegible] from his hand [illegible] the count [illegible] of the Frenchman before he [illegible] from the shock of the attack.

But he gave no evidence that he [illegible] the presence of his opponent.

It is true that Clarice had told the detective that De Morney was wonderfully agile and strong, and that he was reported to be an adept at all physical exercises.

But Nick did not think of these things at that moment.

He remembered only that De Morney had grossly insulted Clarice in his presence and that his presence in the house was a menace to her.

But as he leaped forward, the Frenchman stooped to receive him, resorting to a well-known French trick as he did so.

It is a trick of using the feet in boxing, and Nick was therefore caught off his guard. The Frenchman stooped as if he meant to grapple with his assailant, but instead of doing so, he quickly recovered himself, and, leaping backward a step, he raised his right foot and managed to catch the detective squarely on the point of the elbow.

The effect of that blow, largely accidental, was paralyzing for an instant. It struck upon what is commonly called the "funny bone," and a tingling sensation shot through the detective which for the moment had the effect of paralyzing his activities; and then, in that instant, when Nick might have recovered himself and continued the attack, De Morney seized a lump of polished onyx of the size of his fist that was upon the table beside him and hurled it with all his strength at the detective.

The missile flew true to its aim. It caught the detective fairly upon the top of his head, for he was at the instant leaning rather forward, and it felled him to the floor as if he had been hit with a club.

Nor did the Frenchman pause when he delivered that blow.

Clarice had started to her feet and was standing with clasped hands watching the beginning of the combat; and now the Frenchman, with a shout of exultation, cleared the form of the prostrate detective and seized Clarice in his arms.

Just as he did so, the door opened wide to admit the butler, who had heard the sound of the pistol-shot and had rushed to the room to discover what had happened.

As he opened the door he was within reach of the Frenchman, who was holding Clarice supported by his left arm; and his right being free, he struck the butler with his clenched fist squarely between the eyes, sending him to the floor as if he had been shot.

Then he started through the door, bearing Clarice with him, and in a moment he had passed through the hall to the front door, had thrown that open, and was dashing down the steps to the street, where the carriage which had brought him to the door was waiting.

But already Nick Carter had staggered to his feet—already he was rushing through the front hall toward the door, and he reached the front steps of the house just at the instant when De Morney, having thrown his burden inside the hack, gave the order to the driver to "Drive

"—— blazes!" leaped inside himself and banged the door shut after him.

It was a moment when it was necessary for the detective to think and to act at the same instant.

He knew that Clarice was in terrible peril, and he knew that if once De Morney escaped with her in his power, there would be no help for her, and no fate in store for her save that one which she dreaded more than she did death itself.

And the detective both thought and acted the instant he crossed the threshold.

He threw out his hand and fired a second time; and although he was still somewhat dazed by the effects of the blow he had received from the onyx that had been hurled at him, he was still master of the weapon he used.

The near horse of the two that drew the hack received the bullet directly behind the ear and it dropped dead in its tracks, dragged for a few feet, it is true, by the other animal; and the driver, thinking that he had been shot at himself, leaped to the ground and ran up the street as if he were pursued by a thousand devils.

At the same instant Nick saw the Frenchman throw open the door of the hack and leap out; and he also turned and ran with all the speed he could command away from the scene of the tragedy.

But Nick did not even look toward the man as he fled, for he saw that De Morney was alone; saw and realized that Clarice had been left inside the hack; and he ran to it at once.

Then, as he peered inside, expecting to find her uninjured, he drew suddenly back again with a shudder of horror.

Clarice was there, but the jeweled snake-head of the poisoned stick pin gleamed upon him from the flesh of her delicate throat.

## CHAPTER IX.

### BILL, OF THE MOTOR-BOAT.

Have you ever experienced that thrill of horror which is the result of a sudden mental blow? If you have you can understand how Nick Carter felt at that instant when he discovered the silent and motionless form of Clarice St. Cyr inside the hack, where she was leaning back against the cushions, limp and apparently lifeless, with the jewel in the snake-head gleaming upon him exactly as if it were the eye of a venomous serpent.

The point of the strange weapon had been jabbed into her neck, and surrounding it were two or three tiny spots of blood; otherwise, Clarice looked as if she had fallen asleep.

And in the meantime, while he had ran to the carriage, other things had been happening.

The driver had thought better of his terror and returned to the scene, and he was now bemoaning the fate of his dead horse, which, fortunately for itself, had been killed instantly; and which, if the truth be told, had been such a dilapidated, sorrowful specimen of the horse-tribe in life, that death in any form must have been something of a mercy—and Chick had also appeared upon the scene, for he had followed his chief from the house, and was only a short block away when De Morney rushed from the Glenn mansion.

And so it happened that as the detective looked in upon the silent form of Clarice he became conscious that Chick was at his side.

"Pay the driver for the horse, Chick," he ordered rapidly. "Pay him twice what the animal was worth. Explain the affair to the police, if you can."

He had taken Clarice in his arms while he was talking, and now, as he started with her to return to the house, he was confronted by a person whom he knew well, and one whom he was never in his life more glad to see—Doctor Stag.

"What is the matter, Carter?" asked the doctor; and Nick exclaimed in reply:

"Come with me, doctor. Thank God, you are here!"

So they got inside the house and closed the door before even a policeman appeared on the scene, and a moment later the physician was bending over Clarice in the library, examining the wound she had received, from which he had at once withdrawn the stick pin.

Nick stood by him silently, for he remembered only too well all that De Morney had said at the hotel about the deadly qualities of the venomous weapon; and, believing what he had heard, he had no hope at all that Clarice was not dead.

But after a moment the doctor turned and looked up at him with a smile on his shrewd old face.

"It is not so bad, after all, Nick," he said. "The young lady will pull out all right."

Nick was startled almost as greatly as he had been by the discovery of what he had supposed to be a tragedy.

"Do you mean that she is not dead?" he asked, suppressing the excitement he felt.

"Dead? What gave you that idea? Of course, she is not dead. She is not even badly hurt."

"Why, doctor! She——"

"Wait. Let me finish. The wound is nothing more than a scratch. The shape of the pin has prevented it from entering the throat as the villain who used it intended it to do. See! She is coming around now. It was only the shock of the attack that made her lose consciousness; that and the sudden pain which comes with the wound of any sharp-pointed instrument. We will leave her entirely alone, and let her come out of the faint naturally. It will be better for her that way."

"But, doctor, I had been told that the pin was tipped with a deadly poison," insisted Nick.

"You had, eh? Well, all that I have got to say is that

the man who told you that lied to you; or, if there has ever been poison on that pin, it has long since lost its power."

"Thank God for that! The man who used the pin meant to kill her."

"Oh, I have no doubt of that."

By this time a good many people had collected outside of the house, and there had been two peremptory rings at the door-bell; and now Nick left Clarice in the care of the doctor and hurried outside to attend to matters there.

When he returned, half an hour later, he found that Clarice was quite herself again, and that she had experienced no more serious results than a deep scratch from the pin.

But when the detective would have talked with her the doctor interfered.

"I have taken charge of this case for the present," he said, "and my orders must be imperative. They are that Miss St. Cyr shall retire at once, and that if you two have any matters to talk over together, you must wait until morning to do it. Come along, Nick. Walk as far as my house with me."

They left Chick waiting outside the house to attend to further matters in connection with the dead horse and the police and confidently [illegible] the scene together; and the physician's first question was:

"Nick, who is the young lady who was hurt?"

Nick told him, for Doctor Stag was one in whom the detective placed entire confidence. He told him the whole story of Clarice's life, as he knew about it; and when they [illegible] at the house for a considerable distance.

"She is a beautiful young woman, Nick," said the doctor presently.

"Yes;" absently.

"How old is she?"

"Twenty."

"And that fellow who tried to kill her is her brother's best man?"

"Yes."

"It is a pity that so [illegible] a man's life [illegible]" Nick nodded grimly.

"Did I understand you to say that they [illegible] at the altar?" asked the doctor.

"Yes; that is, within a few moments after the ceremony. They have scarcely seen each other since that time."

"And now the man has suddenly discovered that he is in love with his wife, eh? Let me tell you one thing, Nick; she is not in the least in love with him."

"I know that."

"So. You do, eh? Perhaps you are equally interested as to the name of the person with whom she has found herself in love, eh?"

"Eh? No. I haven't an idea."

"Haven't, eh? Well, it is just as well that you should not have. How long have you been a widower, Nick?"

"What? Oh. About three years. Why?"

"No matter. How long do you suppose it will be before she becomes a widow?"

Nick did not appear to notice the significance of the two questions, but after a moment he replied sternly:

"Just as long as it takes me to prove that Raoul de Morney is the murderer of her father?"

"You think you can prove that, do you?"

"I haven't a doubt of it."

"All right. Here I am in front of my door. Good night."

The physician ran up the steps and without another word disappeared into the house; and Nick continued on his way homeward, deep in thought.

He was recalling bit by bit the memory of that other time when he had been brought into contact with Raoul de Morney, and in order to do so thoroughly he went over the entire case again while he hurried onward.

Juan Santillos, now awaiting death at Sing Sing, distant cousin of Carmen Glenn and in love with her as well as with her millions, had succeeded in abducting the young heiress, after coolly murdering her invadid father. Nick, in following up the case, had been brought into contact with Miss Glenn's maid, Clarice.

In physique and general appearance mistress and maid were not unlike, and Nick had made up the latter so like her mistress that she had succeeded as passing as Miss Glenn in the public dining-room at the Mammoth.

And there a party of Santillos' friends had taken Clarice away and ran with her to the river-front, to which place Nick had pursued them at a late hour of the night; and there on the river-front he had succeeded in hailing a passing motor-boat, which had taken him across the river to Pavonia, where he had captured Santillos and his confederates, rescued Carmen and Clarice, and returned with the entire party to the New York side of the river in that same motor-boat.

Nick remembered that at the time of the quiet [illegible] decided in his own mind that the owner of the motor-boat was in some sort of shady business; that the man had refused pay, but had said that some day he would ask a return favor of the detective.

And now, Nick had recognized in Raoul de Morney the man who had called himself "Bill of the Motor-boat." And it turned out that Clarice was in reality a French countess, and that Bill, of the Motor-boat, was her husband—and that he had recognized her on this occasion.

"Truly, the world is very small," he told himself. "Four months ago Richard Glenn sent me to Morocco in search of his daughter Carmen, whom he had not seen in thirteen years. I found her, rescued her, and restored her to her father. From the other side of the world—

from France—Clarice appeared and became companion to Carmen—— But what is the use in going over all that? The thing for me to do now is to track down Raoul de Morney."

The following morning, as soon as it was practical to do so, he sought out the acting captain of the river and harbor police, and, having taken him to one side, he asked him:

"Captain, do you happen to know anything about a motor-boat that sometimes plies about the harbor called *Starlight?*"

"*Starlight?*" replied the captain interrogatively. "No; I don't seem to know the name. What about her?"

"There is such a boat," said the detective, "although the name may not be painted on her stern. In fact, I don't very much if it is. I should not be surprised, indeed, if we find that the boat to which I refer has the habit of changing her name at the will of her owner."

"I wonder if you can mean a boat that I have in mind that has puzzled us mightily," replied the captain.

"Possibly. I will tell you all that I know about her, and then, perhaps, you will guess."

"Well?"

"She is about thirty feet long; black hull; six or eight feet beam; very fast; goes like the wind; runs very silently—I don't remember a boat that runs as silently as she does, in fact."

"It must be the same one I have in mind, Carter. What else?"

"The man who owns her, or controls her, calls himself sometimes 'Bill, of the Motor-boat.'"

"That's the chap!" exclaimed the captain. "'Bill, of the Motor-boat.' He doesn't call himself that name; it is a name that the police have given him. What about him, Nick? I may as well tell you at once that he has been a mystery to us."

"What sort of a mystery, captain?"

"Well, we haven't a thing against him that we can lay our fingers upon, and yet we are satisfied that the man is a burglar, who preys upon country houses along the shores of the Sound and bay and rivers. We have never been able to catch him, or even to overhaul him; and if we could, then we wouldn't have a thing against him—that is, positively."

"You admit we what about him, captain, and I will tell you all I know—which isn't much."

"I wish you would, Carter."

"Your 'Bill, of the Motor-boat,' is in reality a French count, who is obliged to live by his wits. I suppose him to be a murderer, and I know him to be guilty of some other crimes. Anyhow, I want him badly. Will you help me to catch him?"

"Sure; only the law will be on the other foot—you will be helping us to catch him, for I had about made up my mind to ask you if you wouldn't help us nail that fellow."

"Good! It is six of one and half a dozen of the other. We will make the first effort this very night, and if he appears in his craft we will at least give him a run for his money, eh, captain?"

"You bet your life we will!" was the enthusiastic reply.

## CHAPTER X.

### A MOTOR-BOAT MYSTERY.

"Do you know anything about his haunts?" asked the detective.

"He hasn't any, Nick. He appears here and then there, like a will-o'-the-wisp. He comes and goes like a flash, and there isn't a thing in the harbor that can catch him, unless——"

"I was just about to say that I know one boat that might catch him, if it ever took after him," said the detective.

"So was I. I got as far as the word unless. There is one boat, but she belongs to a rich man, and——"

"Do you mean the *Loafer?*"

"Yes."

"She belongs to Cyril Graham."

"Yes; and she is the fastest thing that ever floated. But Mr. Graham would no more think of letting us make use of her than he would think of giving her to the city outright."

"He will lend her to me. He is a very good friend of mine. I can get her without any trouble at all; the more particularly now, as I happen to know that Cyril himself is absorbed in the automobile races, and hasn't any present use for his boat."

"Can you get her?"

"I am sure of it."

"To-day?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll tell you what we will do."

"Well?"

"You and I will patrol the harbor and the rivers in her to-night together. Two of us will be enough for the capture, for there is never more than two men in the other boat. What did you call her? The *Starlight?*"

"Yes. We will take Chilk along with us. There is room for six people in the *Loafer*, and it may happen that we will have to bring some passengers home with us. There is only one thing in the way of our success."

"What is that?"

"The fact that in all the rivers and harbor you do not know where to look for the *Starlight.*"

"I can tell you where she has been seen more often than in any other locality, if that will be any help at all."

"Never mind that now," said the detective, rising. "Meet me here at four this afternoon and we will go out

together in the *Loafer*. I will bring her around here. I will have Chick with me. After that, we will trust a good deal to luck in being able to find that other boat before the night is over."

"All right."

"It may be that we will have to spend a good many nights on the river before we run afoul of the other boat, but we will find her and capture her, too, before we give it up; eh?"

"Shake on that, Nick."

The detective had gone to his interview with the captain in his automobile, and now, once again under the steering wheel, he guided the big car to Cyril Graham's club, where he had no difficulty whatever in securing the loan of the "fastest boat that floats."

After that was done he thought it high time that he went to make some inquiries concerning Clarice, and accordingly he guided his machine directly to the home of Carmen Glenn.

"Is your mistress at home?" he asked the butler, who came to the door.

"No, sir. She has gone to your house, Mr. Carter."

"To my house? Do you know what for?"

"It is about Miss St. Cyr, sir—that is, about the countess, sir."

"So, you know about that, do you? Well, you may go and tell the countess that I am here and that I would like to see her."

"The countess, sir? Didn't you know?"

"Know what? What are you talking about?"

"She has gone, sir."

"Gone! Gone where?"

"We do not know, sir. We don't know anything at all about her. After all the excitement of last night she went directly to her room; but when, later, Miss Glenn returned, Clarice—I should say the countess—had disappeared."

"Disappeared? Do you know how or when?"

"I know nothing at all about it, sir. She was not in her room. She was not in the house. Nobody in the house had seen her go out. Nobody in the house knew a thing at all about her, sir. She was gone, and that was all there was about it. She had taken a grip along with her, and she had left a note for Miss Glenn—only I know nothing about the note or its contents. Miss Glenn said nothing about it to me. All that I know is that she has gone to your house now to see you about it, and that probably she took the note with her."

"What time did Miss Glenn return home last night?" asked the detective.

"About midnight, sir."

"And it was about ten when I left here?"

"Yes, sir."

"So Miss St. Cyr must have left the house between ten and twelve o'clock."

"Yes, sir."

"Where were you during that time?"

"I was engaged part of the time, sir, in the pantry, putting——"

"That will do. Never mind. Some one is at the door. See who it is."

It was Carmen Glenn who entered, having returned from her fruitless call at the home of the detective; and she uttered an exclamation of pleasure at sight of him awaiting her just inside her own door.

"I am so glad that you are here, Mr. Carter," she said. "Read that"; and she put a folded letter into the detective's hand. "There is another note at your house from Clarice for you, but it is sealed and marked 'Personal,' so, of course, I have no idea what it contains."

"Of course not," said Nick, smiling; and he opened the note that had been given him to read. It said:

"DEAR MISS GLENN: I find that I must go away. There are so many reasons for this move on my part, all of which are important to me, but not one of which would seem of importance to you, that I will not stop now to mention any of them. I have taken such few necessaries as I will require. For other things of mine I will send to you later. I know that you will forgive me for going, Carmen. I may call you that now, may I not, since you know who I really am and know also how dearly I love you? CLARICE."

"I suppose, Mr. Carter," said Carmen, "that you know why she has gone?"

"I suppose," replied Nick, "that she has considered this move of hers the best means of escaping the persecutions of her husband."

"Humph!" said Carmen, tossing her head contemptuously. "She hasn't gone away from here to escape *him*."

"No? Then why has she gone away at all?"

"She has gone away to escape *you!*"

"To escape from *me!* What in the world do you mean?"

"Men are so blind."

"I confess that I am thoroughly so at this moment. Will you tell me what you mean?"

"No; I won't. If you don't know it is high time that you got a little sense into that head of yours."

"Please——"

"Not a word. Take my advice and go home and read your letter. Then, this evening, come around here again and see me."

"I am afraid that I cannot do that this evening. To-morrow, perhaps——"

"Very well; come to-morrow—in the afternoon. I don't want to see you again until after you have read that letter from Clarice. Perhaps it may put some sense into you."

"You are certainly pleased to talk in enigmas, Miss

[illegible]," said the detective; and he bowed himself from the house, and hurried to read that letter to which the young heiress had referred.

But he need not have hurried at all, for there were only three lines across the page of note paper; and there was neither date nor superscription upon it. It read:

"You must not think me ungrateful because I have thought it wisest to go. It is best; I *know* it. My most earnest request to you now is that you will make no effort to find me. My one promise is that when the [illegible] has cleared somewhat I will communicate with you.

CLARICE."

He was still standing with the enigmatical note in his hand, having read it three times, when he was called to the telephone—to recognize the voice of the captain of the river and harbor squad at the other end of the wire.

"Is that you, Mr. Carter?" asked the acting captain.

"Yes."

"Two of my men have just come in and they report that they saw the *Starlight* about an hour ago. She was headed up the East River, and was just opposite Wall-Street at the time they sighted her. I should say that she was probably headed for somewhere along the Sound."

"How many were aboard of her?" asked the detective.

"Three, sir."

"Are you sure that was all?"

"That is the report. I think it is correct."

"How long ago was it that they saw the motor-boat?"

"Half an hour; not much more than that."

"Say, captain!"

"Well?"

"Use your telephone. Talk with the police at City Island, also all along that shore, at any place where you can get anybody to answer. Get everybody that you can to be on the lookout for that boat. Set everything in motion that you can put in motion. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly."

"Keep the ball rolling until I get there. I am going right now after the *Loafer*."

"Yes."

"I will get her and I will hurry to you there; where you are now. You are at your office—your station, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"I should be there in rather less than an hour. We will follow that boat up the river and into the Sound, if she goes that way. You ought to be able to get some news of her with the telephone."

"I think I can."

"Good. Find out all you can before I get there; and have word for any further information that arrives for you after you leave there is to be telephoned to you at City Island. Be ready for me when I get there."

"I'll be ready."

"Be sure to have everybody who sees the boat report to you the number of people who are aboard. I wish particularly to know if a woman is seen. Good-by."

The detective turned to Chick, who was at his elbow. "Clarice has thought it best to disappear," he said. "I haven't the slightest idea that she has fallen into the hands of De Morney; but there is always the chance that he might have been on the watch near the house when she left it. But, anyhow, it is more than ever necessary now that De Morney should be placed so that he can do her no harm. Are you ready to accompany me?"

Chick was ready, and they left the house together at once.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE CHASE THROUGH THE SOUND.

The *Loafer*.

Surely, that is a strange name for a motor-boat which is said—and with good reason—to be "the fastest thing that floats."

When Nick and Chick sat side by side under the glass-fronted hood and saw the foam curl away from her bows and disappear astern of the craft with the swiftness of light, they both experience that sense of exhilaration which comes only to a man when he is conscious that he is excelling.

The *Loafer* has a record speed of thirty miles an hour, and her owner, Mr. Cecil Graham, was known to claim that she could do much better than that; and Nick did not doubt now that she could.

They found the captain awaiting them, and so they merely slowed down for him to get aboard; immediately turning the prow again up the river, and dashing away toward Hell Gate at the speed of a railroad train.

And the captain had several things to report as a result of his experiences at telephoning; so that when the detective asked him if he had received any information, he replied:

"The *Starlight* must have stopped somewhere along the river-front, for she had just been sighted, approaching City Island, when you arrived to take me with you."

"And her passengers?" asked Nick.

"There are three now," was the reply; "and one of them is a woman."

"What!" exclaimed the detective.

"They must have stopped for her somewhere along the route," continued the captain. "That is probably what delayed the boat. There were three aboard of her when she was seen to pass Ward's Island. I telephoned there, also."

"Of course. Are you sure that one of the passengers was a woman?"

"That is what I was told."

"What else do you know about it?"

"Nothing; only the doctor at Ward's who talked with

me over the phone, said that the woman was probably frightened, or seasick, or something was the matter with her."

"Why did he think that?"

"Well, he said she was lying back against the man who was beside her; that her head was on his shoulder, and that she looked to him, through the glass, as if she was ill."

"Or unconscious," muttered the detective.

"The doctor said that might be what was the matter. She might have fainted, or something. He suggested that I should telephone to City Island to have a tug put out into the Sound and stop the boat."

"Did you do that?"

"Sure I did—but, all the same, it won't do any good, Nick."

"You think, I suppose, that nothing can catch her?"

"Sure, don't I *know* it? Ain't I tried time and time again to catch her? In my opinion, there is nothing afloat of the very craft that is under us at this moment that can come within a mile of overhauling her; and the fellow that drives her—Bill, we call him, for want of a better name—is a regular daredevil. He ain't afraid of anything. I think he would run a small boat down and cut it in two before he would let himself be overhauled."

"I have no doubt of that."

"And it's my opinion, too, that he is lighting out of this, for some reason or other. I haven't any particular reason for making that statement other than that I've got a hunch that it is the truth. Who is the woman, Nick? Do you know?"

"I don't know; but I suspect."

"His wife, maybe."

"That is what I fear," replied the detective.

"What you *fear?* Why do you fear *that?*"

"Because she disappeared from her home late last night. She meant to run away from all of her friends. She would doubtless have endeavored to take a steamer for Europe this very day, and if she did that, he might have encountered her on the street. If he did that, she has fallen into his hands, and he has taken her away with him."

"Well, great Scott! Hasn't a man got a right to take his own married wife away with him? If he hasn't, who has? Huh?"

"Question!" said Nick, laughing. "The story is much too long to attempt to tell it now."

"A man eloping in a motor-boat with his own wife! That is a new one on me, Nick."

While the *Loafer* glided through the water Nick gave the police captain an outline of the story of Clarice; and at the end the policeman responded:

"Well, all that I've got to say is this: If we don't catch the craft with this craft, he will never be caught."

Fortunately, they found Hell Gate clear of vessels, and they passed through it at full speed; and at last they drew up and came to a stop at City Island.

The captain had instructed the officers there to be on the watch for him, and so they had not long to wait for the information they were after.

It was to the effect that the *Starlight* had been seen to pass there an hour or more in advance of them, and that only two men had been noticed aboard of her, although it was the opinion of the officer that a third person had been lying at full length at the bottom of the cockpit.

With this information, supplemented by the statement that the *Starlight* had headed as if she meant to pass directly through the Sound, they sped onward again, the *Loafer* put at her best clip, and so dashing through the water at a rate of speed which Nick believed would soon bring the *Starlight* within their range of vision.

Fortunately, the day was a clear one, and the surface of the Sound was as smooth as it ever is, so they were enabled to see a long distance ahead of them.

They passed the Norwalk Islands; they raised Bridgeport in the distance; they passed Stratford Point, and then, later, just when they were off New Haven—and the day had now arrived at afternoon—they discovered a speck on the water far in advance of them which not one of them had any doubt at all was made by the *Starlight*.

Then it was that the detective thought to search through the lockers of the *Loafer* for a glass, and he found an excellent one.

With that he had no difficulty in making out the craft they were pursuing; and he could also see that three persons were seated in the cockpit—two men and a woman.

"We are overhauling her," said the police captain excitedly. "We are traveling two feet to her one."

"Not quite that," replied Nick; "but we are making three to her two easily enough. It will be a long chase. If we catch her before dark we will be lucky."

"There is always the hope that her engines may give out," suggested the captain.

"Or the fear that ours may do so," said Chick quickly, who overheard the remark.

A stern chase is a long chase. That is a proverbial statement, and this occasion proved it well, for although they were all the time conscious that they were gaining rapidly, it was still trying to notice how slowly they did overhaul the fleeing motor-boat.

From New Haven to Oyster Pond Point—the northern arm of land which forms Gardiner's Bay—is a distance of approximately thirty-five miles. Just off the point is Plum Island, and beyond it, somewhat farther out in the water, is Gull Island.

When the *Starlight* dashed through the stretch of water between those two islands the *Loafer* was not quite half a mile astern of it; and then, for the first time

Apparently, it occurred to the occupants of the fleeing boat that they were pursued.

The powerful glass which Nick held in his hands had enabled him long since to make sure that it was the count himself who was at the wheel; and he had also determined that Clarice was the woman passenger, although he could not be entirely certain of that.

But when the *Starlight* glided through the space between the islands—for it *was* Clarice, as the sequel proved was the one who turned and discovered the pursuing boat.

Nick happened to have the lenses of his glass aimed at her at the moment, and he saw her bend forward and say something to the count at the wheel; he saw the Frenchman nod his head without turning it, and then he saw Clarice pick up a glass and aim it toward them.

He watched her. He saw her start. Then she leaped to her feet, apparently in great excitement, and the glasses she had used fell into the water with a splash and disappeared in the depths of the Sound.

And Clarice snatched the veil from her hat and waved it frantically toward Nick, as if the glass she had used had revealed his identity to her.

Her act set the *Starlight* to rocking; it shot her for a little distance out of her course by careening her to one side, and it made the count turn angrily upon her.

He also heard the splash and saw the loss of his binoculars; and then Nick saw him seize upon Clarice and force her quickly down into the cockpit.

Nick thought the Frenchman struck her, but he was not certain of that; all that he really knew was that Clarice did not rise to her place again; that the man who was with De Morney in the boat took the wheel, and that the count searched in a locker, and presently brought forth a second pair of binoculars, which he leveled at once at the pursuing boat.

It was evident that these glasses were quite as good as the others which were lost, for Nick, who still watched him, could see that the count had recognized who his pursuers were.

The detective saw him carefully replace the glasses in the locker from which he had taken them, and then search for something else. What it was, he did not then know, but he was soon to discover.

There was a wait of a few moments, and then the count stood erect in his own boat, facing toward the pursuing *Loafer*; and then, with marked deliberation, he raised a rifle to his shoulders, and took careful aim along the barrel of the weapon.

Have you ever looked through a glass at the muzzle of a rifle that is aimed at you? If you have, you will know that it is an alarming disclosure that comes to you. The yellow brass of the cartridge inside the muzzle, and you wait, without caring to move from your position, for the puff of haze that comes from the smokeless cartridge, and the report which follows almost directly upon it.

"Duck!" said Nick to his friends in the boat. "He is going to shoot, and we are within range." He, himself, never moved; and he could not have told why, either.

Then came the puff of haze; and an instant later Nick's hat raised gently from the top of his head, and fell into the water astern of their craft; and at the same instant the report of the weapon came to him.

"That was a close call," he muttered. "That Frenchman is a good shot with his rifle, captain.

"Did the bullet do that?" asked the officer.

"Yes. And here comes another. Evidently he has got a magazine rifle."

"Duck, yourself, then!" cried the captain.

"It is too late now," replied Nick, as the whine of a bullet sounded in the air close to his right ear.

A third shot followed the other two; and then a fourth. One of them chipped a piece from the slender flag-staff directly in front of Nick, and then glanced harmlessly away, and the other one clipped a sixteenth of an inch from the ear of the captain, causing him to cry out, in the belief that he was shot.

And then there were no more shots for a time, for the *Starlight* disappeared for the moment past Plum Island.

"He'll use that gun again the minute he gets a chance to do so," said the captain. "I wish we had one here. What are you going to do now, Nick?"

"I'll show you in a moment," replied the detective. "There is only one thing to do, and that is to catch that Frenchman, no matter how many rifles or cartridges he happens to have with him—*and catch him we will, too!*"

## CHAPTER XII.

### RUNNING DOWN AN ENEMY.

When they rounded Plum Island, and turned the prow of the *Loafer* so that it pointed almost directly south, Gardiner's Island loomed directly ahead of them, not very far distant; but to Nick Carter's utter astonishment, the *Starlight* was nowhere to be seen.

But even as he looked in amazement for signs of the other craft, she darted into view again from behind the point of the island near them, and the police captain uttered a cry of pain as a bullet from the same rifle penetrated the fleshy part of his left arm.

A second bullet tore after the first one, and Nick's hat showed a hole through the brim. He had pulled the hat tightly down on the back of his head, so that the force of the bullet had not dislodged it.

A third cut through Nick's coat, between his arm and his side, and a fourth knocked away one of the spokes of the wheel he held in his grasp.

He had just righted the wheel to the center, after holding it hard over, in order to turn the boat so that it headed directly for the *Starlight*, when a fifth and sixth bullet came pat-pat, one after the other, the former carrying away another spoke of the wheel, and the latter cutting the wire-cord of the steering-gear entirely off.

The *Loafer* was, however, a twin-screw propeler, and, moreover, her rudder was set exactly at the center when the cord was cut, and so did not deviate a hair's breadth from her course, notwithstanding the fact that her steering-gear was suddenly out of commission.

But there was no telling how long she would hold to her course. The least swell of the water might change the rudder, and send the boat off at a tangent in any direction save that in which the detective desired her to go.

Although the steering-cord was cut, it was in plain sight, for it was arranged along bearing under the rail on either side of the craft.

Instantly Nick leaped back into the after-part of the cockpit, and seized the cords in his grasp at either side, and, although he now had to stand in full view of the man with the rifle, in order to guide the boat, and thus he offered himself as a fair target for the bullets, he did not hesitate.

"Get down!" he ordered the others sternly, and they both obeyed him; Chick, because he knew that Nick meant what he said, and the captain because he was already wounded, and, moreover, because Nick ordered him harshly not to use the revolver he had drawn, with which to return the fire.

There was imminent danger that Clarice would be hit if the fire should be returned.

The *Loafer* was headed directly toward the *Starlight*, which was attempting to cross their bows, for in running into the cove behind the point, evidently with the intention of landing, De Morney had found himself in a cul de sac, from which he saw no means of escape.

During the few moments that followed, the instant that Nick seized the steering-cords in his hands, the *Loafer* seemed to bear a charmed life, indeed.

Bullet after bullet pierced his clothing; bullet after bullet sang past him, whined just above his head or [illegible] the hull of the vessel, but not one of them so much as touched any part of his body.

And then the magazine of the rifle that De Morney was using became empty; the firing ceased; and Nick, who was now within two hundred feet of the other boat, saw the count throw the rifle savagely from him, and draw a revolver from the pocket of his coat.

Nick Carter, with his own unerring marksmanship, might easily have shot the Frenchman then with no danger of hitting Clarice, but it had suddenly dawned upon him that he did not wish to be the man who should kill her husband, although he deserved death a thousand times over.

But two hundred feet of distance is quickly covered by a boat that can get through the water at better than thirty miles an hour, and even as Raoul de Morney drew the revolver, and made ready to use it, he saw plainly that it was Nick Carter's intention to run him down.

Already it was almost too late to avoid the collision, and he fired his revolver wildly in his haste to turn and give an order to his man companion.

The bullet went—Nick did not know where. The count turned as he fired, and attempted to seize the wheel from the grasp of his companion—and as he did so, somebody inside his own head seized him around the legs and tripped him, so that he fell sprawling into the bottom of the cockpit of his own boat.

It was Clarice who did this; and when the count realized who had thrown him down, he struck her savagely with his fist; struck her on the temple, so that she, too, fell, and not to rise, for the blow had rendered her senseless.

And then, as the *Loafer* hit the *Starlight* fairly amidships, the count leaped to his feet again, and fired wildly, almost into the face of the detective.

But in the instant before he fired, something flew through the air toward him, and hit him on the head just before he pulled the trigger; and the force of the blow not only knocked him down again, but it deflected his aim, so that this bullet went wild, as well as the [illegible] had hurled Cyril Graham's marine glasses at the Frenchman's head.

And then came the crash of the collision.

The impact was frightful, for the speed of the two craft must be considered.

The sharp prow caught the *Starlight* [illegible] and it cut into the sides as if they had been made of paper.

The small vessel was almost cut in two, and [illegible]

some time she was turned half-over, so that the water poured in over the top of the cockpit, on the starboard side, at the same time that it rushed into it through the breech that had been made in her side.

The count, who had been knocked a second time off his feet, by the blow from the marine glasses that Nick hurled at him, was whirled out of the boat into the water by the force of the collision; his companion leaped into the water of his own accord, and, by diving, sought to make his escape; and Clarice, still unconscious from the blow of De Morney's fist, would have gone down with the sinking motor-boat, had it not been for Nick Carter.

An instant before the blow of the collision was delivered, Nick shut off the power of the *Loafer*, and then reversed the engine. Then, as the impact came, he called to Chick to stop her again, and, while he was doing, he sprang forward.

For one brief instant he poised upon the rail of the small vessel, and then he darted forward again, into the cockpit of the other boat, and, seizing Clarice in his arms, he leaped with her into the water, free from the sinking boat.

It all happened so rapidly that it has been almost impossible to describe the incidents of the scene, one after another, so that a correct idea may be had of them.

Nor did the hull of the *Starlight* sink, as Nick had supposed it would, and it was evident that she had been built with air-chambers to keep her afloat, no matter what happened to her.

It is certain that now, although a total wreck, the hull floated away across Gardiner's Bay, toward the southern shore of it, and it was also certain that even though she did not go to the bottom, her usefulness was forever past and gone.

When Nick came to the surface of the water, with Clarice in his arms, he found that the cold plunge had revived her, and that her eyes were wide open; he also discovered that, notwithstanding her position of more or less peril, she was smiling into his eyes in perfect content.

Then he heard a hail, and he saw that the captain, with his one good arm, was slowly sculling the *Loafer* toward them, and, in another direction, he saw Chick in the water, swimming rapidly in pursuit of De Morney's companion in the *Starlight*, who was doing his utmost to gain the shore, doubtless unaware of the fact that it and Plum Island that was ahead of him, and that he could not hope to escape from it, even if he did succeed in reaching the shore.

Then he assisted Clarice aboard of the *Loafer*, while the captain balanced the delicately modeled craft at the opposite side; and, having climbed aboard himself, he first turned his eyes toward Chick and the man he was pursuing, and just in time to see the the two grapple with each other on the shingly beach of Plum Island.

In vain he looked everywhere, on all sides of him, for signs of Raoul de Morney.

The French count was nowhere to be seen. He had disappeared utterly, and, with a shudder—for Nick had neither intended, nor wished to be, the death of the man—the detective decided that he had somehow gone down with part of the wreckage of the motor-boat, that was now destroyed for what was left of it was now floating away toward Gardiner's Island, bottom up.

"Where is the count? Have you seen him" Nick asked of the captain.

"Not a sign of him since he pitched overboard, after you hit him with the glasses," replied the officer.

And they found no sign of him, or of his body, either, although they remained in the locality until after the sun had gone down, and there was no longer any possibility of finding him.

In the meantime, Nick repaired the steering-gear of the *Loafer*, and they also ran in toward the shore, close enough to receive Chick and his prisoner on board; and, the moment this man stood before Clarice, she cried out to Nick:

"That is the man who visited me when I was in prison. That is Henri de la Pierre, and he has been Raoul de Morney's companion in all his villainies."

And, later, after they had given up the search for De Morney—when they had decided that he had gone to the bottom of the bay in a tangle with some of the wreckage of the *Starlight*, and had headed the *Loafer* toward the harbor of Greenport, behind the point where Nick intended to find accommodation for his party for the night, and to secure dry clothing for Clarice—she told him how it happened that she was on the motor-boat at all.

"When I left Miss Glenn's house last night," she said, "I went to pass the night with a friend, whom I knew before I ever saw Miss Glenn at all. It was my intention to sail for England to-day, on the *Baltic*. I had been to the booking-office, and had secured my passage, when, upon coming out, I met Raoul face to face.

"He seized me. He called to a policeman, who was near at hand, to help him, and he succeeded in convincing the officer that I was demented. I could not deny that I was his wife, and the result was that I was persuaded to enter a carriage.

"I don't remember much after that, save that he seized me, and, I think, chloroformed me. The next I knew, we were aboard that boat, out on the river, and I was sick and faint.

"But one thing I will tell you," she added, after a pause. "The mystery concerning the murder of my father is solved. Raoul de Morney confessed to me that he committed the deed, and, what is more, that man, Henri de la Pierre, stood just outside the window and saw it done."

"It is true," admitted the captured Frenchman. "I saw the deed done; but I had no hand in it. I admit that I am an accessory after the fact; but no more than that. I never approved of murder, although my conscience has not been squeamish about other things. I will tell you all the story of our career here, later, Mr. Carter, for Raoul and I have committed nearly all the shore robberies you have heard about. I'll take my medicine, and be glad to do it, since it rids me forever of Raoul de Morney."

The next day Nick, with others, returned to the scene of the wreck, and every effort was made to find the body of the French count, without success; and when at last the efforts were abandoned, Nick Carter's only comment was:

"I wish, with all my heart, that I was positive of his death."

THE END.

The next number, No. 528, will be "Clarice, the Woman Detective; or, Nick Carter's Titled Assistant."


## ABOUT THE EARLY NUMBERS OF THE TIP TOP WEEKLY

WE receive hundreds of letters every week from readers asking if we can supply the early numbers of Tip Top containing Frank's adventures. In every case we are obliged to reply that numbers 1 to 300 are entirely out of print. We would like to call the attention of our readers to the fact that the Frank Merriwell Stories now being published in book form in the Medal Library are inclusive of these early numbers. The first book to appear was No. 130 entitled "Frank Merriwell's Schooldays." We have now issued the 404 numbers, some more publishing at each fifth, and by the time of writing. We will be glad to send a fine complete catalogue of the above Library which contains many books and stories. Send a two cent stamp to cover postage.

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